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Unaccompanied Youth in Our Public Schools and Our Opportunity to Lead for Emancipatory Practices (Jóvenes no acompañados en nuestras escuelas públicas y nuestra oportunidad para liderar prácticas emancipatorias)

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Unaccompanied Youth in Our Public Schools and Our Opportunity to Lead for Emancipatory Practices

by

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DEDICATION—*DEDICACIÓN*

This work is dedicated to all supermarket workers

who through a pandemic kept us all well stocked and fed.

I can imagine her doing the same if she was around.

I can imagine her sharing her gifts with the world,

crafting new realities and weaving,

tejidos con colores de dolor, sacrificio y amor.

I dedicate this work to immigrants everywhere.

Your work, your dreams, *su lucha—mueve al mundo*.

I dedicate this work to all

border crossers, keep crossing,

sigan llegando,

es de humanos moverse

transformarse

y forjar nuevos caminos,

para sobrevivir

para sobresalir

para gozar una vida.

This work is for you, *caminante errante,*

Canción que mueve montañas

porque nuestra VOZ vos,

knows no boundaries.

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ABSTRACT

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Unaccompanied youth are migrant children who travel by themselves to the United States, mostly from Central America and Mexico. Since 2014, more than 200,000 unaccompanied youth have entered our country, with approximately 28,000 residing in Los Angeles, California (U.S. Customs and Border Protection [CBP], CBP 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021a, 2021b). Hundreds of these young migrants have enrolled in public schools (Pierce, 2016). Schools seek adequate and effective ways to support these students' complex needs and aspirations. Within the body of research about this sub-group of immigrants there is a significant absence of the voices of unaccompanied youth themselves, which results in limited knowledge and uninformed school policy responses.

This study employed Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) as a methodology to foreground youth agency in capturing counter-narratives that accurately depict the school experiences of unaccompanied youth who find themselves at the intersection of race, gender, immigration status, migration, and class. The questions guiding this study were: How do unaccompanied youth, in the role of youth co-researchers describe, experience, and make meaning of *educación* at a justice-focused high school in Los Angeles? and (b) How can the epistemology of unaccompanied youth inform practices and policies, to ensure a socially-just education, against the backdrop of an anti-

immigrant climate? YPAR is built on the idea that young people have the capacity to conduct research, generate new knowledge, and create transformational social change. This research study built on the epistemology of unaccompanied youth to inform and generate affirming and emancipatory educational practices with youth as agents of knowledge creation. This study provides the field with first-hand information that can be shared in the educational community.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

An increase in public expressions of xenophobic, anti-immigrant, and racist nativist statements followed the election of President Donald Trump in 2016 (Serrano et al., 2018). The incessant rhetoric other-ing immigrants, especially those from the global South, has permeated the news and public discourse with false claims about the heightened criminality among immigrants and even health risks they pose to the nation (Cardoso et al., 2019; Lee, 2015). As a nation we have grappled with a history of exclusion and oppression and understanding the complexity and root causes of the challenges we face is imperative for the future. Kimberlé Crenshaw (2021) posited that to build a nation that better reflects our ideals, "we have to imagine a different baseline from which conceptions of justice and democracy flow—a baseline not beholden to the legacies of genocide and slavery but one of a republic reborn as a multiracial democracy" (para 14). Unaccompanied youth in the United States represent an integral part of a multiracial democracy; their presence is not new, but it is misunderstood and misrepresented (Bhabha, 2019; Heidbrink, 2014; Menjívar & Perreira, 2019). Since 2014 more than 200,000 unaccompanied youth have come into the United States according to data from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (CBP, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021a; DHS, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2019e, 2020). The impact of these young migrants is felt throughout our entire system of immigration courts, communities, and particularly our public schools (Aleaziz, 2019; Barnes, 2019; Castillo, 2019; CBP, 2018; Flores, 2019; Gonzales, 2019; Herrera, 2019b; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2018; "I can't feel my heart", 2019; Pierce, 2015; Sweetland Edwards, 2019). According to

Pierce (2015) "[T]he most visible and immediate impact of this new child population is felt by local school districts, which are serving growing volumes of new students, often with little time to prepare" because public schools must enroll students, regardless of country of origin in a reasonable amount of time to ensure educational rights (p. 9). However, the enrollment process can translate into inadequate responses by school systems that are already overwhelmed and ill-prepared to receive this vulnerable population of students.

Background

Definitions, Numbers, and Terms

Technically, unaccompanied youth are children and youth who travel by themselves to the United States. The majority of unaccompanied youth are between the ages of 13-17 and come from Mexico and Central America (Rosenblum & Ball, 2016). During the surge of unaccompanied youth in the summer of 2014, more than 102,000 unaccompanied children from Central America and Mexico were apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border; 76,000 of those 102,000 unaccompanied youth, originated from the Central American Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (DHS, 2019e; Pierce, 2015; Rosenblum & Ball, 2016). Although the news media focus on this group of young migrants has receded and shifted to family units, data from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection showed a constant flow of unaccompanied youth coming into our country. In fiscal year 2017, CBP apprehended 41,435 unaccompanied youth at the border, in 2018 the total was 50,036, in 2019 the number was 76,020 in 2019, and in 2020 the total was 30,557 (CBP, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021b). The family separations during the Trump administration have left thousands of children without their parents, or viable guardians, as the administration deported undocumented adults that sought to

take in some of these children and youth and implemented other draconian measures in its efforts to stymie immigration (Kopan, 2018b; Pierce & Bolter, 2020). Although the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) was in charge of processing unaccompanied youth, there are discrepancies between the protocols stipulated in ORR documents and what has been happening in practice (DHS, 2019a). The detrimental effects of Trump-era policies added to the population of unaccompanied children and youth in our system, some of whom have been held in detention indefinitely given the administration's policies (Pierce & Bolter, 2020).

For the purpose of this research study the term unaccompanied youth or unaccompanied child referred to these young migrants traveling by themselves to the United States. In much of the media the term unaccompanied minor was also used, but the term "minor" minimized the agency these young migrants possessed and inadvertently portrayed them as a minor problem or category within our current immigration challenges (Perez Huber, 2015). Thus, the use of the term unaccompanied youth or child was intentional.

In contrast, the United States government through multiple offices like DHS, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), CBP, and the ORR labelled these young migrants as Unaccompanied Alien Children or UAC (DHS, 2019e; HHS, 2018). Moreover, since the spring of 2019, the DHS has called immigrants from Central America that are caught at the U.S.-Mexico border the inadmissibles*,* as a way to qualify in no uncertain terms, that these migrants will not be welcomed by the United States, even when they have not had the chance to present their cases for asylum or any other relief. The term inadmissibles has been added to all the charts and tables that depict the number of migrants caught by CBP. The DHS has added warning labels to archived materials to remind

the reader that policies and classifications are constantly changing (DHS, 2019b). Since taking office, President Biden has issued a number of executive orders to review Trump's policies (White House, 2021). This initial move from the Biden administration was just to review policies and unfortunately, as of 2021, the websites for all the departments that deal with immigration still contained the term inadmissibles (CBP, 2021a, 2021b).

General Policies

As per previous laws, unaccompanied children have no lawful immigration status in the United States; some will be reunited with parents, while others will be placed in the custody of guardians and sponsors (HHS, 2019a, 2019b). An important distinction is that the unaccompanied youth from Central America used to be considered refugees which allowed them to be considered for asylum (Tello et al., 2017). The Trump administration changed the decades-old policy, making children the most prominent collateral damage of its exclusionary practices (Castillo, 2019). Many policy changes have resulted in longer stays in detention centers, deportations, and right out denial of basic rights like access to clean water and humane conditions (Einbinder, 2018; Pierce, 2019; Pierce & Bolter, 2020).

School Destinations

Although it has been difficult to know how many of these young migrants ended up in each individual school district across the nation, there has been a way to track the number of unaccompanied youth who were released in each state. California and Texas received the most unaccompanied children between 2014 and 2015; these states also have the largest proportions of Central American origin immigrant communities which can facilitate the adaptation process for these young migrants. The ratio of unaccompanied youth released per every 1,000 foreign-born

residents in Texas and California was 31:1,000 and 12:1,000 respectively. There are hundreds of thousands of foreign-born individuals in these two states and thus, hundreds of unaccompanied youth were released in both California and Texas. By contrast, states like Alabama, South Carolina, and Ohio have received lower number of unaccompanied youth but a higher ratio of them compared to their small Central American origin communities or foreign-born individuals. For example, in Alabama the ratio of unaccompanied youth to the number of foreign-born individuals was 116:1,000; in South Carolina the ratio was 47:1, and 67:1,000 in Ohio. The smaller immigrant-origin communities in these three states complicated adaptation and access to linguistic, cultural, and familial networks for these youths (Pierce, 2015). Not surprisingly, states like Alabama and South Carolina, have responded with exclusionary policies that have attempted to deny access to public schooling to unaccompanied youth, in clear violation of the U.S. Supreme Court Case *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), which guarantees a free education to all students regardless of national origin (McCorkle & Bailey, 2016). The challenges unaccompanied youth face in schools were the central problem explored in this study, but because schools are part of micro and macro systems surrounding these young migrants, it was important to understand the larger socio-political context.

The National Context: Building Walls and Emitting Hate

In the national environment President Trump used the threat of international gangs to erode protections for unaccompanied youth and curtail ways in which they could seek asylum from the dire circumstances they have left in their home countries; his administration even rewrote guidelines for judges dealing with deportation proceedings for youth and eliminated funding to support children and youth with legal assistance (Einbinder, 2018). President Trump

has also encouraged municipalities to take immigration into their own hands by invoking the 287(g) provision of the 1996 *Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act* which devolved authority to initiate deportation review to local law and enforcement (Einbinder, 2018; Pierce, 2019; Pierce & Bolter, 2020). This legal violence unleashed on communities resulted in serious consequences on the development of youth and their communities (Heidbrink, 2014; Menjívar & Abrego, 2012; Yoshikawa et al., 2016). Hundreds of communities had already used the 287(g) provision to terrorize individuals, but with the President's endorsement the violence expended on immigrant communities has augmented (McCorkle & Bailey, 2016).

While most Mexican children are quickly returned to Mexico, U.S. law provided for different treatment for unaccompanied youth from noncontiguous countries. These children used to be transferred to the ORR, an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that was responsible for their care, while these children were placed into immigration proceedings (DHS, 2019a; HHS, 2019b; Rosenblum & Ball, 2016). This policy was modified under the Trump administration which aggressively eliminated various policies and existing laws meant to protect unaccompanied youth (Barnes, 2019; DHS, 2016, 2019a; Pierce, 2019; Pierce & Bolter, 2020).

Media outlets also portrayed the multiple ways in which the Trump administration eroded protections for these young migrants. In the first year of the Trump administration a major change took place through a memo issued by the U.S. Department of Justice, which gave immigration judges the authority to adjudicate whether a child traveling alone met the criteria of unaccompanied child. Previously, DHS had the sole authority to decide on the classification of a migrant as an unaccompanied child and the classification remained in place throughout all

immigration proceedings (Einbinder, 2018). In July of 2019 the administration attempted to institute a new policy that would deny asylum seekers the opportunity to request asylum without first seeking protections in another country; this new policy was blocked by an injunction in 9th District courts. Unfortunately, on September 11, 2019 the U.S. Supreme Court, at the request of the administration, lifted the lower court's block on the restriction (Barnes, 2019; Castillo, 2019). Unaccompanied youth coming from noncontiguous countries were still unable to file asylum petitions and had remain in another country, before seeking other options for relief.

In August of 2019 Interim Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin K. McAleenan held a press conference to highlight changes to the *Flores Settlement*, which provided general protections for unaccompanied youth (DHS, 2019a). The *Flores Settlement*, as it is known, was the result of a lawsuit on behalf of an unaccompanied youth from El Salvador. In 1985, Jenny Lisette Flores, a 15-year-old migrant, was apprehended at the border and would not be released to her aunt. She was held at a juvenile detention center where she was strip-searched and subjected to other abuses. The American Civil Liberties Union sued on her behalf and other children. In 1997 a settlement was achieved which provided for certain protections for unaccompanied youth and children such as limiting detention to no more than 20 days, having access to basic necessities like water, toilets, personal hygiene items, and sleeping quarters. This settlement also did not differentiate between children or youth traveling alone or with a known adult (Stracqualursi et al., 2019). Thus, for decades the *Flores Settlement* limited the number of days unaccompanied youth could be detained, heightened standards of care for detained children, including that they could not be housed with adults, and allowed for children to be released to

family members and/or parents living in the United States, while they awaited immigration proceedings. Often applied to family units, youth and parents were released rather than detained.

During that August 2019 press conference interim DHS Secretary McAleenan presented two major changes to the Flores settlement: (a) family units would be kept together in detention to await immigration proceedings, and (b) family detainees would be housed in residential family compounds, indefinitely, changing previous policy and practice (Pierce & Bolter, 2020). The rationale provided for these changes was twofold, detaining entire families in facilities, while expediting their cases would reduce the pull factor for migrants, and the new rules could protect children from fraudulent traffickers that may pose as parents or guardians of unaccompanied youth. The policy's goal was to process families in less than 50 days in order to deny any petition of asylum. Most of these families were what the Trump administration labeled as inadmissibles (HHS, 2019b). Another measure the administration pursued was the completion of a border wall along certain areas of the border. In early summer of 2019, $7.5 billion in Pentagon funds were allocated to build part of the wall. The Department of Homeland Security's website offered frequent updates regarding the construction of sections of the wall along the border. All these efforts were meant to stymie the influx of migrants. The Trump administration declared early on an unequivocal commitment to using and pursuing all available options to slow down immigration to the U.S., particularly from certain nations of the Global South (Barnes, 2019; Castillo, 2019; DHS, 2016). The new Biden administration has presented an agenda that purports to undo the damage caused by the Trump administration but some worry that most of the executive orders are mere reviews of the policies without any aggressive actions to ameliorate

the conditions for immigrants and asylum seekers, including unaccompanied youth (Aguilera, 2021; Bolter et al., 2021; Shear & Kanno-Youngs, 2021).

Migration Journeys, Detention, and Reception

Multiple reports detailed the treacherous journeys unaccompanied youth undertake to travel to the United States, their experiences in detention centers, and the type of reception these children endure by their host communities (Aleaziz, 2019; Burnett, 2019a; Burnett, 2019b; Dominguez Villegas, 2014; Flores, 2019; Gonzales, 2019; Herrera, 2019a; Herrera, 2019b; "I can't feel my heart", 2019; Nazario, 2014; Pierce, 2015; Suro, 2019; Tello et al., 2017). Visits by U.S. Representatives as well as an audit conducted by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services concluded that the conditions in many of the detention centers are deplorable, inhumane, and include poorly qualified and vetted employees (Flores, 2019; Gonzales, 2019; Herrera, 2019a; "I can't feel my heart", 2019; HHS, 2019c). Guards have reportedly told detainees, including children, to drink water out of toilet bowls. Young mothers and infants are malnourished and not receiving appropriate care; children who have been separated from their parents show signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with long-lasting consequences that will impact their behavior, development, and cognition (Flores, 2019; Gonzales, 2019; Herrera, 2019b; "I can't feel my heart", 2019; Yoshikawa et al., 2016).

Reports and an audit conducted by the Inspector General revealed a systemic problem of employees without proper background checks working with young children. Six facilities, including two intake facilities and four shelters, had received waivers from background checks from the ORR, a measure that is illegal for shelters (HHS, 2019c). Among these six agencies

investigated, five of them allowed employees to self-report whether they had ever acted improperly with children. Clinicians, meant to provide mental health support, were often underqualified with no degrees or expertise in the area and one employee had no record of ever graduating from college or completing a counseling program. Youth who turned 18 while in detention centers were abruptly removed from facilities and placed with single adults, sometimes in other states (Burnett, 2019a). Between September 2018 and May 2019 there have been six deaths of unaccompanied children under the care of U.S. authorities or shortly after being released (Dickerson, 2019; Herrera, 2019a). After these deaths, the public has learned that only the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency is required to report deaths within 90 days. The other agencies in charge of unaccompanied youth have internal policies to facilitate the sharing of significant information, but are not required to do so and thus the data is incomplete (Herrera, 2019a). The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021 exacerbated the conditions at detention centers where spread of the virus was rampant, pushing some detainees to question whether waiting proceedings was worth the wait in such precarious conditions and news organizations like the Los Angeles Times sought to access public records about these centers (Castillo & Zou, 2020; Dreier, 2020)

The draconian measures of the Trump administration exacerbated the situation for unaccompanied youth through the implementation of policies of exclusion, detention, and expedited deportations. Some of these policies are being investigated for violating international laws and agreements which is why immigrant and civil rights advocates and even state governments continue to sue the Federal government for violations of immigrants' rights (Bhabha, 2019; Burnett, 2019b; Gonzales, 2019; Pierce, 2019). Acting Secretary of Homeland

Security Kevin K. McAleenan called the legal actions a legal dialogue that was welcomed by the Trump administration (DHS, 2019a). Even U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor shared concerns that the legal process was not being followed because the administration constantly pressured the Supreme Court to act at the President's requests (Barnes, 2019). During the Trump administration, unaccompanied youth came into a socio-political context marked by xenophobic, racist, and nativist rhetoric that can gravely impact their development and adjustment to their host country and schooling experiences (Bhabha, 2019; Heidbrink, 2014; Suárez-Orozco, 2019; Yoshikawa et al., 2019). For the thousands of unaccompanied youth who came after 2018, most of the protections within asylum policies were eradicated or put on hold. Some of these young migrants will never receive any type of immigration relief (Castillo, 2019).

For the thousands of other migrants who are already here various challenges have arisen (Pierce, 2015). First of all, the backlog in immigration cases is resulting in more closed cases that offer no relief or path to permanent residency or citizenship. Secondly, for those who were able to begin proceedings under special visas like the Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ) program meant for victims of abuse, abandonment, and neglect, the process might be blocked as Trump-era policies terminated or unnecessarily complicated proceedings. The future of these young migrants in our schools, cities, and local communities is uncertain, even with the new Biden administration's agenda (Bolter et al., 2021; Pierce, 2015; White House, 2021). What remains certain is that these young people are part of our communities and as human beings, deserve the chance to start anew with opportunities for healthy development and fulfilling lives (Bhabha, 2019; Cardoso et al., 2019; Heidbrink, 2014).

Positive Reception in Local Contexts: Unaccompanied Youth as Assets

Unaccompanied youth have suffered tremendous traumas both at their countries of origin and through the journey that takes them from lands as far as Honduras to the United States border (Acuña & Escudero, 2016; Dominguez Villegas, 2014; Nazario, 2014; Pierce, 2016). "Embracing and helping immigrant students to achieve their full potential is the educational challenge of our generation" urged Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2016, p. 13). The authors described the importance of understanding the immigrant experience as separate from other issues in education, and of creating programs that addressed both the psychological and educational needs of students, especially during the initial transition period. Understanding who these students are is essential to helping them thrive in their new land, and their success can inform the positive development of our own democracy and society (Banks, 2019; Bhabha, 2019; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2016; Waters, 2019).

Unaccompanied youth have been released in a variety of states, including the three states with the largest Central American populations, which included Texas, California, and New York (Pierce, 2015). Some communities have taken a proactive role in welcoming these young migrants and supporting their integration; these communities welcomed unaccompanied youth as an asset (Acuña & Escudero, 2016; Clark-Kasimu, 2015; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2015). For example, in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, school communities adjusted instructional and teacher professional development practices, from the elementary to the high school level, to help unaccompanied youth adjust and thrive (Zimmerman-Orozco, 2015). At the high school level, depending on their age, students were supported through intensive English acquisition programs and vocational training. For Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFEs), who required

additional literacy support, the county was focusing first on primary language literacy. Communities like Anne Arundel received unaccompanied youth with care and support. The district office, albeit small, crafted professional development for teachers and administrators, encouraging educators to appreciate the courage these students exhibit as a tremendous asset for the county and the nation as a whole (Zimmerman-Orozco, 2015).

Miles away in San Francisco, California, schools partnered with community-based organizations to provide services for unaccompanied youth—from academic tutoring to socio-emotional help in overcoming deep trauma (Clark-Kasimu, 2015). Non-profit organizations, like Refugee Transitions, provided services after school and conducted home visits that became a one-stop shop for family members as well. However, even the most well-meaning non-profit organizations or schools were ill-prepared to answer all the needs of unaccompanied youth and thus additional networks, including after-school spaces, were necessary (Clark-Kasimu, 2015).

South of San Francisco, the Los Angeles Unified School District assisted unaccompanied youth through their Student Enrollment and Placement Assessment Center (SEPA), which works closely with the district's department of mental health, and community partners to provide a more holistic system of supports. The Los Angeles Unified School District has absorbed hundreds of these students (Acuña & Escudero, 2016). The curated resources, often in partnership with community organizations, sought to address the traumas students incurred including PTSD and depression, living with violence, the difficulties of the journey to the United States, adjusting to the new land and language, and issues around family reunification. Acuña and Escudero (2016) interviewed students who have participated in these services to assess its impact and document early stories of success. Working with community organizations and

training school personnel was also an important part of the district's approach. The theme around synchronization and coordination of services outside the school, emerged as a possible way to support these students and warrants further study.

On the more nefarious spectrum of seeing unaccompanied youth as an asset are the labor trafficking cases that have come to light. Altan and Cediel (2018) depicted the deplorable conditions under which unaccompanied youth were living in an egg farm in Marion, Ohio. These teenagers had been aggressively recruited in Guatemala, their country of origin, with promises of work and school. Due to more lax procedures regarding the release of youth, these teenagers ended up with sponsors that were sub-contracted by the farm as a way to attract cheap labor (Altan & Cediel, 2018). According to Miller (2014) labor trafficking has not received the same attention as sex trafficking and thus often goes unreported; laws also make it much more difficult to prove. Other sources also depicted the reality facing many unaccompanied youth, who often have to work long hours to sustain themselves in this country; their labor is seen across the service industry (Martinez, 2016).

Negative Reception in Local Contexts: Unaccompanied Youth as Threats

In other local contexts, there were instances where unaccompanied youth were persecuted and criminalized (Gaviria, 2018; HHS, 2018; Tsui, 2018). In 2017, Suffolk County, New York, received hundreds, if not thousands of unaccompanied youth. Here, the focus was on criminalizing these young refugees (Gaviria, 2018). Gang-related crimes in the area were the impetus for creating new policies that were enacted by public schools to "identify" gang members among unaccompanied youth (Gaviria, 2018). Under the name *Operation Matador,* Suffolk County law enforcement, with the help of school personnel and the Department of

Health and Human Services, apprehended 500 young people from the local high schools (Gaviria, 2018; HHS, 2018). According to Gaviria (2018) these youth were initially suspended for possibly participating in gangs. Parents were given very little explanation and no evidence for the suspensions the school issued. Notification letters contained confusing language regarding the possible expulsion of students. Many of these students were then transferred to high security prisons designed for unaccompanied youth without a hearing or a date for a possible hearing. The memos issued by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency listed no reasons for why these youth had been detained and were not being released within a given timeline. Attorney Julia Harumi Mass, with the American Civil Liberties Union in northern California, presented a class action lawsuit on behalf of 28 of these unaccompanied youth held in a maximum-security facility in California (Gaviria, 2018). Twenty-six of the youth were released once hearings were held for their cases. Of great concern in these cases, was the creation of new high security prisons for unaccompanied youth in states like Virginia and California, where youth are kept for months without a hearing and without contact with parents or guardians (Tsui, 2018).

If the literature showed how traumatizing the detention centers have been for unaccompanied youth, one can just imagine the detrimental effects of being locked up in prison without ever going to trial or fully understanding the reason for imprisonment; this type of persecution only adds to the existing challenges unaccompanied youth have been confronting (Acuña & Escudero, 2016; Gaviria, 2018; Heidbrink, 2014; Pierce, 2016; Tello et al., 2017; Tsui, 2018; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2015).

Facing the Problem

While some districts in California, Maryland, and Delaware were creating specialized programs to support unaccompanied youth, other districts like New York's Nassau County, home to the fifth-largest population of unaccompanied youth, attempted to "bar some children from enrolling for failure to present certain documents related to immigration status" (Pierce, 2015, p. 12). In North Carolina, the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution for the immediate removal of unaccompanied children from the county and for the immediate cease of additional unaccompanied youth placements by federal authorities. Several counties in North Carolina followed a similar pattern after the Brunswick actions (Pierce, 2015). The deep variance in responses towards unaccompanied youth pointed to the need for additional resources, including knowledge and preparation on how to best support these newcomer students. Educators are often ill-equipped to deal with the numerous traumas these immigrant origin students have experienced; school systems are inadequately structured to support their learning and ensure their academic and social success. All these factors highlighted the need for additional research about this particular group of immigrants (Cardoso et al., 2019; Heidbrink, 2014; Patel, 2013b; Pierce, 2015; Yoshikawa et al., 2016).

Possible Avenues for Change: Unaccompanied Youth Leading the Way

In spite of all the challenges found in public schooling, schools remain the most promising public institution to champion the needs of unaccompanied youth (Howard & Taylor, 2015). This newcomer population of students needs school systems to translate their potential into actual success, and to see in them the promise of youth, optimism, and a relentless desire to learn and contribute to our society in unforeseen ways (Acuña & Escudero, 2016; Bhabha, 2019;

Clark-Kasimu, 2015; Franquiz & Salinas, 2013; Heidbrink, 2014; Patel, 2013a, 2013b; Pierce, 2015, 2016; Suárez-Orozco, 2019; Tello et al., 2017; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2015). Through the use of youth participatory action research (YPAR), this study revealed the capacity of unaccompanied youth to produce the necessary knowledge to inform how school systems can better understand their needs and thus create emancipatory schooling practices.

YPAR is built on the idea that young people have the capacity to conduct research, generate new knowledge, and create social change that moves others to act (Buckley-Marudas, 2018; Fine, 2016, 2018; Fine et al., 2016; Mirra et al., 2016; Nishida & Fine, 2014; Sandwick et al., 2018). One aim of participatory research methodology is for young people to share their knowledge with stakeholders to effect changes in their local milieu. According to Cammarota and Fine (2008):

> What perhaps distinguishes young people engaged in YPAR from the standard representations in critical youth studies is that their research is designed to contest and transform systems and institutions to produce greater justice—distributive justice, procedural justice, and what Iris Marion Young calls a justice of recognition, or respect. In short YPAR is a formal resistance that leads to transformation—systematic and institutional change to promote social justice. (p. 2)

Unaccompanied youth need to be engaged to open up substantive possibilities for change. Given the anti-immigrant sentiments the country is still processing from the Trump administration, YPAR represented an indispensable methodology to engage with unaccompanied youth to generate new knowledge and fuel activism around more inclusive and affirming school practices. The students' epistemology shed light on ways in which schools can respond to this population to honor their experiences, build on their strengths, and offer access to authentic opportunities for self-actualization (Ozer & Piatt, 2017; Santelli et al., 2017). Youth civic engagement in the United States has tackled issues like: (a) gun violence by students from Parkland, Florida,

embodied by Emma Gonzalez; (b) immigration through the Dreamers who advocated for the Dream Act, and were represented by young leaders like Evelyn Garcia; (c) racism through the Blacks Live Matter movement, as enacted by young organizers like Charlene Carruthers from BY100 Project in the south side of Chicago, and (d) environmental concerns through the Sunrise movement which led to the Green New Deal, a prominent issue for the 2020 election (Witt, 2019; Carruthers, 2018). Unaccompanied youth can lead the way in their own search for self-definition, empowerment, and activism.

Research Questions

Insufficient research has been conducted that provides rich and thorough descriptions of how the 'unaccompanied youth' identity influences the schooling experience for these youth. The purpose of this study was to explore the educational experiences of unaccompanied youth through youth participatory action research in order to foreground youth voice and agency. This research study was guided by the following research questions:

- How do unaccompanied youth, in the role of youth co-researchers describe, experience, and make meaning of *educación* at a justice-focused high school in Los Angeles?
- How can the epistemology of unaccompanied youth inform practices and policies, to ensure a socially-just education, against the backdrop of an anti-immigrant climate?

The term *educación* in the first research question was used to incorporate the richer meaning the term holds for Latinx students and families, especially immigrant families. *Educación* referred to a concept in Latinx culture that an education includes more than formal schooling, it encompasses a way of being, a way of honoring one's elders, one's history, one's networks,

demonstrating good manners, and a humane approach to others. Espino (2016) defined *educación* in this manner:

> The concept of educación [*sic*]refers to the ways in which Mexican American families incorporate the values of personal development and respect for others as part of what it means to be educated as well as layer lessons taught in the home with lessons taught in the classroom (Auerbach, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2006). According to Auerbach (2006), "The cultural schema of educación has a powerful impact on how Latino immigrant parents participate in their children's education," which often entails offering "moral support on the sidelines" rather than performing normative forms of parental involvement (p. 278). As a result, parents and families emphasize the moral development of their children in the home while encouraging good behavior at school. (p. 75)

This concept of family support was evident in all the youth narratives. There was a close relationship with family that was extremely significant and impactful but was not situated as burdensome. These youth did not present a conflict between the familial expectations and their own individual dreams. The interdependence and connection was deep and a source of motivation and strength. Yosso (2005) incorporated the idea of a sort of consciousness that is shaped by *educación*, an awareness that informs every aspect of one's life and carries with it modeled lessons from kin and circles of influence like sports, community practices, school, or church. This *educación* is part of one's familial capital (p. 79). Valenzuela (1999), Auerbach (2002) and Yosso (2006) also broached the multidimensionality of *educación* in Mexican-American and Latinx family contexts.

The aim of the study was to leverage the identities and epistemology of the youth to gain insight into how they experienced schooling, with the goal that their knowledge could then inform emancipatory school practices. Their description, experience, and interpretation of *educación* in their new land pointed to salient factors that contribute to healing environments for

immigrant-origin students. The goal was to share these findings throughout the educational community.

Significance of the Study: Emancipatory Spaces Created by Youth

Social Justice Leadership (SJL) in education has always interrogated current power dynamics that replicate systems of oppression and marginalization (Lewis, 2016). Today, it is time for the docket of social justice leadership to include the voices of unaccompanied youth in current and future educational practices and contexts. Incorporating immigrant origin youth as change agents allows SJL to live up to its mission to generate authentic community engagement, inclusive learning environments, critical conversations that question hegemonic beliefs, and authentic participation that translates into shared leadership and transformative collective action (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018; Horsford, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2013; Lewis, 2016; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Williamson et al., 2007). According to Theoharis (2007), social justice leaders and organizations intentionally create just and equitable schools for subaltern groups of students. School leaders working for social justice make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalized conditions central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision (O'Malley & Capper, 2015; Pazey & Cole, 2012; Theoharis, 2007).

Within the Social Justice Leadership (SJL) framework, it is imperative for schools to create systems that support the most vulnerable student populations, populations like unaccompanied youth, who are violently attacked by politicians like former President Trump and other agencies in their local contexts. In order to address the needs of these immigrant students, schools and their leaders must engage with students and push back against the current wave of

dehumanizing rhetoric about immigrants (Bhabha, 2019; Cardoso et al., 2019; Waters, 2019; Yoshikawa et al., 2019). Beyond teaching students English or helping them acculturate to their new land, public schools need to craft entire networks of support that prepare these young immigrants to succeed in academic settings and contribute positively to their communities, not simply as cheap labor (Clark-Kasimu, 2015; Franquiz & Salinas, 2013; Patel, 2013a, 2013b, 2017, 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008; Suárez-Orozco, 2019; Yoshikawa et al., 2019). Engaging youth in forging a path towards more inclusive and transformational schooling is a step in the right direction.

Theoretical Framework: The Explicative Power of CRT

This study employed Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework. CRT offered: (a) explicative power to analyze the centrality and intersection of race and racism through its micro and macro manifestations; (b) a path to challenge dominant ideologies, in this case about immigrants; (c) a commitment to social justice through an agenda to end racism and exclusion, as well as to empower marginalized communities; and (d) a saliency of experiential knowledge, in this case the lived experiences of unaccompanied youth conducting the research as valid ways in which to generate new knowledge (Bell, 2002; Bernal, 2002; Khalifa et al., 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lopez, 2003; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002). The CRT framework revealed the capacity of unaccompanied youth to support the development of affirming educational systems that allow these students to thrive.

Research Design and Methodology: Youth as Co-Researchers

The study utilized a participatory design to spotlight "complex chronicling of counter stories" and to nurture "the contestation of dominant narratives with the people who have been

misrepresented as Others" (Fine, 2016, p. 47). As a methodological tool, Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), carried educational significance because it pushed for a shift in paradigm where youth were active agents in the research process and had a voice in determining the implications of the research for appropriate educational responses, policies, and practices (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Fine, 2016; Fine et al., 2016; Mirra et al., 2016; Ozer & Piatt, 2017; Santelli et al., 2017; Weis & Fine, 2013). In engaging with unaccompanied youth, it was extremely important to create safe spaces for this population to generate their own stories and knowledge about themselves. Even with vulnerable populations of adolescents, Ozer and Piatt (2017) argued that it is important to see young people as agents in research and to shift from the dichotomy of inclusion versus protection, to the concept of inclusion with protection, because youth have the capacity to generate knowledge and participate in systems that impact their lives. The knowledge created and shared by unaccompanied youth will surely inform practitioners, policy makers, and researchers.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

The following limitations were all amplified by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021 and its impact on public schools. As schools closed their physical spaces and shifted to virtual learning, vulnerable populations of students were negatively impacted by the closures and the disruption in relationships with caring adults. Students and educators took time to adjust to the new learning platforms. Unaccompanied youth and immigrant-origin students faced significant challenges in the school. Thus, one of the main limitations of the study was access to participants who were willing to engage in participatory research about their own immigrant experiences, considering their vulnerability given both the anti-immigrant climate at

the time of the study and the effects of the pandemic. Attrition also impacted the study as a few students who would have participated in the study left the school to move to other states or to hold additional jobs, as a way to mitigate the instability the pandemic caused to their families. In addition, as the principal of site where the research was conducted, the principal investigator was conscious of the power dynamics at play. However, she considered her positionality as the school leader a strength more than a limitation. She had access to the students through trusting relationships that were built over time.

A delimitation of the study was the fact that it was conducted at only one public high school in the metropolitan area of Los Angeles. YPAR methodology requires a lot of time and resources and thus expanding to other sites would have be untenable given the scope of this research study and the ensuing pandemic. However, the knowledge generated by the unaccompanied youth as co-researchers will be shared widely with other educational agencies, community-based organizations, and local universities.

Finally, as a Central-American immigrant the principal investigator came to the project with a positive view of immigrants and an asset-based orientation that focuses on the potential these students have to contribute to our society.

Summary: Looking Ahead

Given the continued large influx of unaccompanied youth into our country, regardless of ever-changing policies against them, schools need to better prepare to support these students in their educational journeys. Chapter 1 has outlined the problem and the significance of this study. Chapter 2 provides a synthesis of existing literature on the racialized nature of schooling in the United States, with implications for unaccompanied youth and the gaps this study hoped to fill.

Chapter 3 details the Critical Race Theory and Youth Participatory Action Research methodologies and the methods that informed this study. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research and recommendations for action. Finally, Chapter 5 offers policy recommendations based on the students' epistemologies and experiences.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research study focused on unaccompanied youth and their experiences in public schools. The first chapter presented background information on this population of students and the challenges public schools encounter to serve their academic and socio-emotional needs. The research questions focused on the students' epistemology to unearth the issues that impact their schooling experiences and how students, as co-researchers, can inform efficacious school responses. This second chapter represents a review of the literature to help contextualize schooling in general with a focus on unaccompanied migrants. The review also presents promising practices for unaccompanied youth that are centered on their particular needs. The chapter concludes with a review of undocumented immigrant youth activism to advance the potential youth participatory action research (YPAR) has to facilitate more just, responsive, and affirming schooling practices for unaccompanied youth.

The Breakdown: From Racialized Schooling Practices to Emancipatory Methodologies

The first section of the literature review interrogates the purpose of schooling in the United States through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT). The CRT lens helps disinter the racialized nature of schooling experiences for immigrants of color, which unaccompanied youth represent, as they are mostly from Mexico and Central America. This study was about a marginalized group of students of color for whom the intersection of race, ethnicity, language, immigrant status, immigration journeys, and low socio-economic status mattered and defined how school systems viewed them and ultimately educated them. CRT lent its explicative powers to contextualize the project of schooling in general, with a focus on immigrant-origin youth

(Bernal, 2002; Cardoso et al., 2019; Drake, 2017; Howard & Taylor, 2015; Patel, 2013a, 2013b, 2017; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). The second section presents school practices that have provided more inclusive settings for unaccompanied youth by addressing the sources of trauma and stressors in students' lives and building on their substantive assets (Jaffee, 2016; Oikonomidoy, 2014; Ramirez & Jaffee, 2016; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2015). The third section highlights undocumented immigrant youth activism to illustrate the capacity of immigrant youth to effect positive change in our democracy and society. Through a CRT framework of analysis, this study demonstrated that unaccompanied youth as youth of color, are holders and creators of knowledge who can enhance educational experiences for all students (Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lopez, 2003; Sablan, 2019; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002).

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is introduced in the fourth section, as an ideal vehicle to affirm unaccompanied adolescents as persons and rights holders with the agency to self-define, resist hegemonic responses to their very existence, and strive for social change (Buckley-Marudas, 2018; Fine et al., 2016; Santelli et al., 2017). Although unaccompanied youth have been coming to the United States for decades (Menjívar & Perreira, 2019), the recent surges that have caught intense media attention, necessitate that a review of the literature include a broad compilation of sources that ranges from news articles, to government agency reports, and scholarly work detailing their experiences.

Part I

The Purpose of Schooling in the United States: Access and Opportunity

The purpose of public education in the United States is certainly a contested space—marked by a tension of "education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to

reinforce domination" (hooks, 1994, p. 4). For marginalized groups like African Americans, Latinx, Native Americans, Asian Americans and certainly immigrants, access to an emancipatory education has been minimal because of systemic infrastructures that have historically rendered the experiences of these marginalized groups as insignificant and unimportant. In fact, educational spaces for marginalized groups have often been about learning obedience (hooks, 1994).

In the search for representations of the purpose of schooling in the United States, there are two parallel stories that unfold. One story tells of the broad, general system that was designed to serve White students and possibly certain groups of White immigrants and their children as it became necessary to reify a racist system. The parallel story is one that belongs to marginalized groups: these subaltern communities were not included in the original plan to educate the masses and in fact have often had to fight for their right to be seen as citizens of this country, and at a more basic level, to be seen as human beings with unalienable rights and dignity, including the right to be educated and to have their stories and contributions acknowledged (Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lopez, 2003; Sablan, 2019; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Spivak, 1988). Hegemonic forces have created structural systems that consistently deny subaltern groups access to make their voices heard and it is those structures and systemic networks that CRT interrogates and speaks out against through counter narratives (Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lopez, 2003; Sablan, 2019; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Spivak, 1988).

In *American Education* Joel Spring (2018) summarized the last two centuries of education into the political, social, and economic purposes for schooling to provide an extensive

overview of the evolution and role of public schools in the American system. Spring argued that from the 1820s through the 1840s there was an emphasis on teaching common values and morality for the development of the new country. Moreover, the theme of education as a provider of opportunity to advance economically begins to take shape at this time and continues to be an important theme in American education into the present time.

Absent from Spring's (2018) summary were the years preceding the Civil War and the period that followed through Reconstruction, which ended in 1877. The Civil War certainly interrupted schooling endeavors for the entire country, particularly in the North where some had access to education. The aftermath of the Civil War conjured a rebirth for the nation as it tried to pull itself together through the period of Reconstruction (Mitchell, 2008). During this period of time, significant and long-lasting events affected education in our nation, solidifying the role race plays in accessing educational opportunities as provided or denied by the State. The view that education was the means to transform the future was widely held by the freedpeople after the Emancipation Proclamation: "For former slaves, too, the education of their children was critical to protecting their rights and autonomy after emancipation" (p. 4). But the prospect of educated freedpeople fueled fear in both the North and the South: For the Northern urban working-class there was apprehension that jobs would be lost to newly emancipated Black Americans; for middle-class Northerners the feared centered around what would happen to the Southern plantation economy and how this would affect Northerners' economic advancements. In the South, where slaveholders had made it a crime to teach slaves to read and write for fear they would write their own cards of emancipation or fight for more rights, the idea of educating former slaves was outright frightening (Ladson-Billings, 2012; Mitchell, 2008). These direct

threats to White nationalism and White supremacy gave way to codifications of who should be educated through public means and to segregation as the natural order of things in education, and other public institutions (Mitchell, 2008).

Although mixed or integrated schools after the Civil War were short-lived in states like Louisiana and North Carolina, freed people raised funds for schools to continue and in fact advocated for education for all, including poor white children who had had no public education until then. Before Reconstruction, public education did not exist in the South, and was in fact the direct legacy of Black legislators who fought for public schools and compulsory education for black and white children (Hannah-Jones, 2019). Unfortunately, what remained of the struggle for education for all with the emancipation of slaves in the United States were: (a) segregation as the best way to educate, (b) the continuance of race (with its changing definitions to protect Whiteness as construct) as a means to determine whether one deserves an education, and (c) continued discrimination that would be codified through Jim Crow laws and social science research for the next one hundred years (Ladson-Billings, 2012; Mitchell, 2008). The racialized nature of public education continues today with immigrant youth, especially immigrants of color. Deportation data show a disproportionate number of deportees from the global South and state laws attempting to block access to education, housing, and employment not only to immigrants but their U.S. born children (McCorkle & Bailey, 2016; Yoshikawa et al., 2016). A full discussion of this evolution is beyond the scope of this paper but it is important to recognize the struggle that has been carried out, especially by African Americans, to ensure all young people have access to a free education.

From about the 1880s to the 1920s the shift is on the Americanization of immigrants (primarily White immigrants from Europe), training the labor force needed for industrialization, family and child welfare, including health care and access to food through the school (Spring, 2018). In addition, at this time, the public school was also set up to teach anti-communism in the population, a response to the rise in social activism due to documented labor abuses of the time (Owens & Valesky, 2015; Spring, 2018). In this early part of the twentieth century there is also a wave of progressive reforms that attempt to bring more engaging and active democratic learning in classrooms as embodied by the educator John Dewey and schools in cities like Gary, Denver, Houston, and St. Louis (Owens & Valesky, 2015).

Unfortunately, for certain sub-groups of students, education was still unattainable or functioned in a way to subjugate groups to specific roles in the society. During this same period of time, social scientists and professors of education like Lewis Terman, inventor of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence test, were arguing that Spanish-Indian and Mexican students were dull and their dullness was clearly racial which made them efficient workers but not thinkers or scholars (Ladson-Billings, 2012). According to Spring (2018) during this time there were two major methods that education was used as a means of social control towards Mexicans and Mexican Americans, the first was concerned with denying access to education to prevent the acquisition of knowledge and possible economic advancement, and the second was segregation. The sentiments of the time were articulated by school superintendents, principals, and farmers alike, the following is a recorded statement by a Texas superintendent: “You have doubtless heard that ignorance is bliss; it seems it is so when one has to transplant onions. . . . So you see it is up to the white population to keep the Mexican on his knees on an onion patch or in new

ground" (Spring, 2018, p. 167). The same argument was used for Native Americans who were not granted U.S. citizenship until 1924, and for whom the system of education simply focused on assimilation and the erasure of language and culture (Spring, 2018; Grande, 2008).

The 1920s through the 1940s, the period of the Great Depression and recovery efforts through the New Deal, saw an educational focus on the expansion of high school education as a means to control youth and to keep them out of the labor market by extending the number of years they needed to be in school (Spring, 2018). For communities of color—Mexican Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans—there was still a persistent curtain of exclusion and discrimination, sanctioned by case law like *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which essentially created the separate but equal doctrine that resulted in disparate educational conditions for students from marginalized communities (Spring, 2018). In fact, many of the New Deal policies were explicitly crafted to benefit the White population with marginalized communities being left out completely of housing, employment, and educational benefits (Rothstein, 2017).

The decades of the 1950s through the 1980s included the civil rights struggle and key cases to end segregation and unequal conditions in education like the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954, which declared segregation was inherently unequal and the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, which aimed to deny federal funding to institutions engaged in discriminatory practices, including schools. Amidst the struggle during this period there was an emphasis on the school as a place to build harmony across racial and cultural differences sometimes through desegregation efforts. Sadly, desegregation efforts were often met with much resistance in the South and in the North where *de jure* segregation led to a consistent practice of segregation that

often began in exclusionary labor and housing policies that created segregated schools (Baugh, 2011; Rothstein, 2017). The War on Poverty which sought to rectify systemic problems that led to the exclusion of student populations encountered robust resistance to changes that would have truly leveled the playing field for all students. During these decades, there was also a focus on competition against the Soviet Union through the production of more scientists and engineers, although not all student populations enjoyed the same access to these pathways that mostly benefited White students (Spring, 2018).

Racist practices that isolated communities and reduced access to public services, including quality schools, were rampant across the nation and served to exclude not only African Americans, but Mexican Americans, other Latinx origin populations, and Asian Americans whether they were native born or immigrant (Rothstein, 2017; Spring, 2018). Although a full historical review of the ways in which public schooling was denied to Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans on the basis of race and citizenship is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that there are clear patterns that surface among these populations, sometimes called dominated cultures because of the ways in which they came to be part of the United States, notably Native Americans and Mexican Americans (Spring, 2018). The issue of citizenship as a tool of exclusion is one that runs across all these groups in the United States and that illustrates the racialized nature of citizenship in the United States and its use to block access to educational opportunities (Patel, 2017). For example, the *1790 Naturalization Law* denied citizenship to Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican American/Latinx because they were not white (Spring, 2018; Takaki, 1998). However, the construct of whiteness fluctuated from being a color to being Caucasian, depending on who needed to be excluded. At the time,

only whites had a claim to citizenship and the rights therein including access to education; some of these restrictions were not rescinded until 1952 through the *McCarran-Walter Act* (Patel, 2017; Spring, 2018; Takaki, 1998). Similar policies today block access to higher education to undocumented youth, non-citizen youth, and even children of immigrants (McCorkle & Bailey, 2016; Patel, 2013b; Serrano et al., 2018).

Historically, for groups that were finally granted citizenship, such as Mexican Americans at the end of the fight with Mexico in 1848 or Native Americans in 1924, there were specific efforts to abridge citizenship rights through voting limitations, segregation in public accommodations, and access to schooling (Spring, 2018). All of these ethnic groups were forced to be in segregated schools for decades and efforts to win access to desegregated, high-quality educational opportunities were won through legal battles and activism. For example, in the 1946 case *Mendez vs. Westminster School District of Orange County*, the U.S. District Court ruled that segregation of Mexican Americans was illegal. This important legal win encouraged other cases to come forth. In 1948 in Texas, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) supported a lawsuit against segregated schools, which were common in Texas. In *Delgado v. Bastrop* segregation was finally declared illegal after decades of *de jure* segregation. Through the activism of LULAC, local schools in Texas and Arizona were able to support bilingual and bicultural education (Spring, 2018).

Similar examples can be presented for Native Americans who in 1819, through the *Civilization Act,* were "educated" by missionaries to forget their languages and cultures. This brutal attack on their languages and culture continued through the 1867 Indian Peace Commission which called for a cultural transformation through reservations and boarding

schools away from tribal influence, to the establishment of the Carlisle Boarding School in which children were forced to work and forget their culture and language, while enduring physical and psychological abuse (Spring, 2018). Through the civil rights movement important gains came in the form of the *1972 Indian Education Act* which provided financial assistance to local Native American schools that affirmed linguistic and cultural legacies in tribal communities and through the 1974 policies from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which finally granted freedom of culture and religion to Native Americans (Spring, 2018). Of course, none of these would have happened without the mobilization of communities and legal battles.

A similar pattern of exclusion and struggle to fight for educational rights took place within the Asian-American community, particularly Chinese and Japanese immigrants. In 1872 the California school code excluded Chinese and all Asians from accessing any education. By 1885, thanks to pressure from the Asian community, California agreed to have schools for Chinese students as long as they were segregated (Spring, 2018). It was not until 1943, that Congress rescinded the *Chinese Exclusion Act (Act to Prohibit the Coming of Chinese Persons into the United States*, 1882*)* that had been in effect since 1882, and which essentially prohibited any public service or access to services be given to Chinese immigrants. In 1974, the case *Lau v. Nichols* finally required schools to provide special help for students whose first language was not English and offered an opening for primary language support (Spring, 2019). All these cases illustrated the politicized and racialized nature of schooling in the United States and how the construct of citizenship has been tied to the evolution of who deserves access to schools and under which conditions, conditions which today impact the educational opportunities for unaccompanied youth in public schools.

From the 1980s to the early 2000s, starting with the report *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) there was a huge shift to see schools as failures and in need of more oversight by the federal government, including measures that pinpointed what was wrong with schools (Owens & Valesky, 2015; Spring, 2018). The continuous debate over the purpose of schooling shifted to more traditional educational practices to help students reach specific achievement goals. In other words, the control of learning through testing took shape at this time (Lipman, 2013; Spring, 2018). From the early 2000s through the present, we have seen a move to privatize public education and use neoliberal accountability systems to render more public schools as failures; not coincidentally and rather intentionally these "failing" schools are in urban settings with large populations of students of color and immigrants (Lipman, 2013; Lipman, 2015).

As we move to the present and consider the schooling conditions in which unaccompanied youth find themselves, within a national rhetoric fueled by the Trump administration's racist terms that considers immigrants "rapists, criminals" and disease-carrying beings in spite of contrary evidence (Lee, 2015), the need for activism and a counter narrative about who these young people are is absolutely necessary. Marginalized communities have had to fight and will continue to fight for access to the promises of democracy enshrined in our foundational documents and public institutions. The work to support unaccompanied youth, currently one of our most vulnerable student populations, will draw from the legacy of resistance that African Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans have built throughout the last 200 years.

Part II

The Promise of Public Schools for Immigrant Students

For immigrant students, the Supreme Court Case *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), was an important access point as it guaranteed the right to a free public education to all students, regardless of immigration status, nationality, or income. In spite of our nation's historically exclusionary and assimilationist educational practices, our public schools are still strategically situated to respond in ways that can facilitate the adaptation and success of immigrant-origin youth like unaccompanied minors, by building on their strengths and assets through transformative pedagogical and instructional practices that extend beyond the teaching of English (Aganza et al., 2019; Banks, 2019; Clark-Kasimu, 2015; Franquiz & Salinas, 2013; Howard & Taylor, 2015; Liou et al., 2017; Noguera, 2019; Patel, 2013a, 2013b, 2017; Spring, 2018; Waters, 2019; Waters & Pineau, 2015; Yoshikawa et al., 2019).

This portion of the literature review focuses on public school practices that are supportive to the adaptation, development, and success of unaccompanied youth. Additionally, the literature advances the argument for qualitatively different ways to educate immigrant-origin youth like unaccompanied migrants, through what Banks (2019) called *human rights cosmopolitan education* or Jaffee's (2016) *culturally responsive active citizenship education*. In human rights cosmopolitan education the goal is to create emancipatory spaces that lead to full civic participation and a commitment to the improvement of human conditions for all. Similarly, culturally responsive active citizenship education calls students, especially newcomers, to engage in community-based projects that leverage their worldview and agency. In essence, these scholars called for transformative, culturally and linguistically affirming curriculum, that

interrogates the binary notions of citizenship as either granted or not granted, and demonstrated the racialized and fluid nature of citizenship in the United States as a measure of worth and access. Through this type of education unaccompanied youth can find their place in the educational system to build a genuinely healthy self-identity and maintain a desire to make a difference in their host country, something that many of them already have a deep desire to do (Banks, 2019; Bhabha, 2019; Jaffee, 2016; Oikonomidoy, 2014; Patel, 2017; Ramirez & Jaffee, 2016; Suárez-Orozco, 2019).

Adaptation: Learning a New Land

Research on the adaptation process for unaccompanied youth showed many similarities with that of other immigrant-origin youth. Arriving to the United States sets in motion a learning experience that encompassed more than just learning a language, it involved learning a new land. The concept of learning a new land is based on a longitudinal study by Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008) that provided an inside view into the school and home experiences of immigrants at the secondary level. In their study the authors argued that coming to a new country represented learning an entirely new system of being and interacting, one learns a new country—a land. Although the participants in this foundational study were not unaccompanied youth, many were undocumented. Researchers have found that the process of adaptation to learning a new land is similar for all immigrants because they may deal with issues like family separation and reunification, overcoming trauma from detention centers, acquiring host country cultural competencies, acquiring the English language, learning and maintaining home culture, forming social, ethnic, and national identities, developing a sense of social belonging that includes interacting with other ethnic groups, bridging cultures, working to support familial obligations,

and adapting to new school models that may be very different than those in the country of origin. All these challenges were referenced across multiple sources of the literature (Keller et al., 2003; Martinez, 2016; Oikonomidoy, 2014, 2015; Patel, 2013b; Roxas & Roy, 2012; Sattin-Bajaj, 2015; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011; Waters & Pineau, 2015; Yoshikawa et al., 2016).

Research also indicated that as adolescents, unaccompanied youth simultaneously navigated universal developmental tasks, while also engaging in both acculturative and enculturative tasks that involved adapting to their new homeland, with very specific risks for unaccompanied youth who have faced developmental risks prior to and during migration. Some of these developmental risks include severe violence, extreme poverty, and often a lack of access to supportive networks like parents, peers, and familiar school systems (Heidbrink, 2014; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018; Yoshikawa et al., 2016). Although unaccompanied youth coming from Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras had high premigration knowledge about what it means to live in the United States (through experiences shared by family and friends), the almost mythical prosperity associated with living in the United States was in stark contrast to the reality these young people found in the mostly low-income immigrant neighborhoods that welcomed them, or in the detention centers where they spent months before being released to family or guardians (Acuña & Escudero, 2016; Cardoso et al., 2019; Heidbrink, 2014; Menjívar & Perreira, 2019; Nazario, 2014; Patel, 2013b; Pierce, 2016; Yoshikawa et al., 2016). Adapting to a new family also resulted in depression and anxiety, often most acute in the first year in the country and less pronounced by the fifth year of residency in the United States (Suárez-Orozco at al., 2011). Unaccompanied youth face specific

socio-emotional challenges directly derived from their treacherous journeys that must be addressed in schools and other institutions (Cardoso et al., 2019; Dominguez-Villegas, 2014; Heidbrink, 2014; Nazario, 2014; Tello et al., 2017).

Sources of Trauma and Stress

Tello et al. (2017) presented thorough descriptions of the traumas experienced by unaccompanied youth. The study included analysis of sixteen student narratives that distilled important themes (a) reasons for leaving, (b) their journey to the United States, and (c) their current living conditions. The reasons for leaving their homelands included extreme poverty, violence, and lack of family support because their parents and other family members already resided in the United States. Regarding the journey, some youth reported excruciating physical and emotional pain that left them scarred and traumatized. On the positive side, some of the youth reported feeling hopeful when they received help along their journey. These unaccompanied youth shared that being in the United States was not idyllic as they had imagined; discrimination, worries about an uncertain future, difficult family reunifications and figuring out their place in their new land weighed heavily on students' minds and hearts. However, this group of unaccompanied youth also reported gratitude for individuals who had helped them and a tremendous interest in giving back to their U.S. communities. In general, the themes presented by Tello et al. (2017) permeated the literature and echoed the main traumas unaccompanied youth experience, like gang violence in their home countries, extreme poverty, sexual and physical abuse, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from the journey to the United States, depression as triggered by leaving family behind, and feeling lonely and out of place in their new homes (Acuña & Escudero, 2016; Aganza et al., 2019; Cardoso et al., 2019;

Clark-Kasimu, 2015; Gaviria, 2018; Heidbrink, 2014; Menjívar & Perreira, 2019; Nazario, 2014; Patel, 2013b; Pierce, 2016; Waters, 2019; Waters & Pineau, 2015; Yoshikawa et al., 2019; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2015).

Other studies have found that unaccompanied youth often work long hours to pay debts incurred by traveling to the United States, to sustain families back home, or because they are supporting themselves without any familial assistance; this is especially true for students who are the victims of labor trafficking (Altan & Cediel, 2018; Cardoso et al., 2019; Martinez, 2016; Miller, 2018). These young refugees often maintained two households, one in their country of origin and another one here in the United States, especially if they were living with relatives, roommates, or guardians (Heidbrink, 2014; Martinez, 2016; Patel, 2013b). For these youth, attending school was close to impossible and some dropped out or never enrolled; however, there were also unaccompanied youth who against all odds attended school full-time, became engaged with their school communities, and sustained full-time work (Altan & Cediel, 2018; Martinez, 2016; Patel, 2013b). The focus on improving themselves through education was a testament to the resilience among unaccompanied youth, even when they found themselves in liminal states of immigration, precarious housing conditions, difficult familial relations, and other contextual circumstances that presented complex challenges (Oikonomidoy, 2014, 2015; Patel, 2013b; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2015). The promising practices in the field supported the educational and socio-emotional development of unaccompanied youth and recognized not just the traumas and academic needs but their resilience, ingenuity, cosmopolitan worldview, and agency.

Affirming Educational Spaces: Focusing on Student Assets

Every immigrant group's experience is different and influenced by the immigration experience itself, English language proficiency during arrival, existing ethnic community at the time of arrival, and family supports to facilitate the transition. In the case of unaccompanied youth, their experiences vary greatly and are influenced by the drastically different approaches to the receiving and educational approaches they encountered across the nation. Due to this variance, Oikonomidoy (2015) recommended schools take the time to ascertain specific student needs rather than clump all newcomers under large labels such as English Learners or immigrants, obfuscating refugee status and issues around documentation. Furthermore, Patel Stevens (2011) warned schools against simply focusing on literacy and language acquisition without considering contextual, social, and legal factors impacting students' lives. She argued for a critical literacy education to teach students how to interact with the dominant cultural while being critical of it to demystify the educational system including its limitations for access. Some public schools are already addressing the issues posited by Oikonomidoy (2015) and Patel Stevens (2011) and exceeding the requirements set forth by *Plyler v. Doe* (1983) to educate all students regardless of immigration status. Schools in New York, Arizona, and California are creating affirming spaces for unaccompanied youth that allow these students to acquire English while maintaining a healthy identity, develop social networks, and engage in civic projects to effect changes in their immediate communities and beyond (Jaffee, 2016; Noguera, 2019; Oikonomidoy, 2014; Ramirez & Jaffee, 2016). The projects presented in the research involved a civically minded problem-solving orientation that leveraged the lived experiences of unaccompanied youth.

According to Oikonomidoy (2014) it was important for educators to view the level of sophistication young immigrants possess regarding their newly found identity as citizens of the world. As unaccompanied youth traversed through thousands of miles to reach their final destination, these young people acquired an empirical understanding of the world around them, their cosmopolitanism develops through their experiences. For example, unaccompanied youth traveling from Honduras will travel first to El Salvador, then to Guatemala, Mexico, and finally to the United States. Each of those countries has a different transportation system, supports for migrants, currency, government responses to migrants, and even linguistic differences that require a high level of adaptation on the part of the young refugees. Even if Spanish is the lingua franca of all those countries, each country and region in those countries may use different lingo and or expressions to communicate certain ideas or concepts (Dominguez Villegas, 2014; Nazario, 2014; Oikonomidoy, 2014; Rosenblum & Ball, 2016; Tello et al, 2017).

Oikonomidoy (2014) used a framework of cosmopolitanism to classify the experiences of young immigrants. With a broadened view of the world, unaccompanied youth can be seen as tremendous assets to U.S. schools because of the rich perspectives they hold regarding the world. In addition, other scholars showcased the ingenuity, courage, agency, and resilience students demonstrated by making such a treacherous trip in search of a better, safer life (Acuña & Escudero, 2016; Heidbrink, 2014; Nazario, 2014; Oikonomidoy, 2015; Tello et al., 2017; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2015). Heidbrink (2014) interviewed several unaccompanied youth and witnessed first-hand the agility with which they navigated complex legal and social systems. Heidbrink argued that the current ways in which we view these young people is not accurately portraying the powerful skills they possess and develop through migration and other life

experiences. Surely these attributes can be leveraged and translated into school success by creating contexts that allow for those world views to surface through civic education that engages their experiences in ways that can enrich our institutions and thus our society and democracy (Banks, 2019; Jaffee, 2016; Ramirez & Jaffee, 2016).

Noguera (2019) presented case studies where youth-led projects assuaged serious tensions between immigrant (Central American) and native-born youth; the youth involved were agents in the framing and addressing of the problems at their schools. Students' lived experiences, with support from adults, led them to understand their own conditions vis-à-vis the experience of other students, in this case African American students in their urban schools. By deepening students' knowledge of systemic oppression and the limitations of schooling itself, students were able to create cultural and ethnic bridges that strengthened the entire school community. In Ramirez and Jaffee (2016) school sites in Arizona and California showcased teachers utilizing a culturally responsive active citizenship framework in history that allowed students to acclimate to their new environment while tackling important issues in the community. Attendance was higher among these students as was their level of achievement. Students reported through interviews, feeling a sense of purpose and connection to their education. In other words, deciphering their role in their new U.S. communities translated into higher levels of engagement and thus academic success (Ramirez & Jaffee, 2016; Franquiz & Salinas, 2013; Jaffee, 2016). The school community itself also recognized students as an asset and a source of new ideas and revitalization, rather than as a burden. Moreover, Bang (2012) found that when teachers took the time to know their students and understand their individual context, homework assignments were tailored to meet their learning and labor needs. This individualization

translated into higher homework completion, overall engagement in school, and improved attendance.

Banks (2019) advocated for schools that invite cosmopolitan views that can help immigrant and non-immigrant youth construct spaces where they can experience human rights and "an education *through* human rights in order to internalize rights, ideals, beliefs, and behaviors" that embody positive values (p. 239). In his theoretical framework Banks explained stages of development where individuals begin with cultural psychological captivity, or an identity that is closed off to other groups, to advance to embracing biculturalism, multiculturalism and reflective nationalism, eventually adopting globalism and global competency as the final stage in which individuals possess "the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively in their own cultural community, in other cultures within their nation-state, and in the civic culture of their nation as well as in the global community" (p. 243). The communal benefit was the collective power to enhance conditions for all. This framework encapsulated the empirical data provided by the studies aforementioned and highlighted the immeasurable benefits, a diverse society like the United States would create by reimagining schools as a place to learn through a type of cosmopolitanism that is rooted in human rights education (Bang, 2012; Jaffee 2016; Noguera, 2019; Ramirez & Jaffee, 2016).

Inside classrooms, research indicated that incorporating culturally, contextually responsive and affirming education augmented student engagement and academic success for unaccompanied youth (Bang, 2012; Franquiz & Salinas, 2013; Jaffee, 2016; Noguera, 2019; Ramirez & Jaffee, 2016). By understanding the laws and issues in their own communities, students found their voice and became active citizens, not just passive recipients of policies,

opening up possibilities for these young migrants to leverage the agency they already possessed (Heindrick, 2014; Patel, 2013b). The worldviews of unaccompanied immigrant youth can enrich the educational experience of others; Patel (2013b) described having immigrant students, including unaccompanied youth with whom she worked in a public school, act as teacher assistants in her undergraduate and graduate courses on immigration. The young migrants' experiences provided primary source information to university students who ignored the vicissitudes faced by immigrants and the complexity of our immigration laws and policies.

First and Next Steps: Navigating U.S. Schools and Processes

In order to enact emancipatory and culturally affirming school responses educational systems will have to invest the time to acquaint themselves with students' stories and trajectories. The first step in schools according to Sattin-Bajaj (2015) is to demystify the enrollment processes and schooling system in the United States, including school choices, academic requirements, additional learning supports, age policies that may not allow a student to complete high school in a regular setting, access to higher education, and other options that may fit students' work schedules (Martinez, 2016; Patel, 2013b). Secondly, school systems need to devise creative channels to build students' academic literacies that extend beyond learning English and use student prior knowledge and experience to enhance learning conditions (Franquiz & Salinas, 2013; Patel Stevens, 2011).

However, school systems need to simultaneously avoid falling into the imaginary rhetoric and positioning about what schooling can do for students, as if academic success instantly translates to access in our system, which continues to be highly stratified and in which immigrants still represent an important source of labor (Patel, 2013a; Patel Stevens, 2011). Patel

(2017) proffered that "Migrant populations can be parseable into both anti-black model minority symbols and coolie labour. These projects of parcelled out personhood depict more accurately the contingent racialized realities of social locations than does the binary logic of citizenship" (p. 67). This binary logic of citizenship may be wrongly promulgated through a curriculum and instructional practices that gloss over the complexities of American history and the state's relationship to marginalized communities, like unaccompanied youth. Herein lies the importance of maximizing the worldviews unaccompanied youth have developed because they have the sophistication to dissect their new system to exercise their own agency in their educational journey. If schools are not cognizant of the intersection of race, gender, ethnicity, language, undocumented status, and income level for these students and how that maps out onto the larger societal system, it may be very easy to simply pass on myths regarding meritocracy in our society, thus ignoring other racist and exclusionary practices that will render their educations minimally useful. Therefore, there is a need for critical literacies and perspectives that ensure schools are not just playing the role of in *loco emporium*, in place of the empire, to relegate these young migrants to the kitchens of fancy restaurants and hotels (Franquiz & Salinas, 2013; Howard & Taylor, 2015; Martinez, 2016; Oikonomidoy, 2014; Patel, 2013a; Patel Stevens, 2011; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2015).

The voices of unaccompanied youth can be a catalyst to improve the conditions for all students and thus create educational spaces that result in the practice of freedom rather than education to merely enforce domination; "it has never been more important to listen, first and foremost, to the voices of those at the margins, who remain excluded from the dialogue yet are still confident that education is a place of possibility for them" (Liou et al., 2017, p. 80).

Immigrant-origin youth are already demonstrating an immense capacity for action and social change. Undocumented youth in particular represent a subaltern (Spivak, 1988) voice that albeit denied formal access to societal structures, has found a way to speak and be heard. The activism sparked by Dreamers or Deferred Action Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, must be discussed as an important platform for what unaccompanied youth's epistemology may be able to offer to the purpose and process of schooling in the United States.

Part III

Immigrant Youth Activism: DREAMers in Action

Unbeknownst to most Americans, the fight for a pathway to citizenship for young undocumented immigrants has been going on for decades. In 2001, a Senate bill was introduced titled the *Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM Act, 2001)*; the bill never came to pass and was quickly tabled before any discussion ensued, but its name would live on and characterize hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants fighting for immigration reform now known as DREAMers (Altschuler, 2011). Activism for the passage of this bill was initiated by immigrant-origin youth who came to the United States as children and due to exclusionary and discriminatory immigration policies, remained unable to adjust their immigration status. These young men and women were intent on crafting and pushing for policies that provided them with relief and access to full participation in society. Slowly, disparate movements across the nation began to coalesce creating a more coherent message meant to mobilize elected officials to act in favor of immigration reform. Their activism represented the power of critical, civic participation that operationalizes the democratic ideals of our institutions (Altschuler, 2011).

The 2008 election of President Barack Obama fueled the campaign for the *DREAM Act* with a new-found hope and enthusiasm; that same year DREAMers launched the nationwide network United We Dream which has utilized media campaigns at all levels to mobilize young people to become unafraid and unapologetic about their undocumented status (Altschuler, 2011; Graham, 2017). In parallel, in 2009, the campaign for Reform Immigration for America (RIFA) brought together labor and immigrant rights coalitions to push for immigration reform that would support undocumented workers and individuals in general. The RIFA was unprecedented in its ability to finally bridge labor, human, and immigrant rights organizations to fight together for immigration reform. The campaign utilized a variety of captivating stories of individuals tangled in the web of immigration dysfunction to illustrate the importance and urgency of sweeping immigration reform (Altschuler, 2010; Sharry, 2009). The grassroots networks associated with RIFA mobilized hundreds of thousands of phone calls, emails, and faxes to Senate offices. The goal was to push forth broad immigration reform. However, through grassroots youth activism by DREAMers, it became evident that the *DREAM Act* had a better chance of passing than more sweeping legislation in 2010. Young undocumented activists convinced RIFA campaign supporters to focus on the *DREAM Act* (Altschuler, 2010).

In order to build momentum and shift the national discourse around immigration, DREAMers launched a series of public and civil disobedience acts that mounted pressure on the Obama administration while informing the public at large about the plight of undocumented immigrants. The actions included rallies, marches, sit-ins, study-ins, and a hunger strike that took place in July of 2010. By December of 2010 all major newspapers printed editorials in support of the *DREAM Act* which seemed highly plausible at the time. The added RIFA supporters who

were now advocating for the *DREAM Act* added needed boots on the ground. The bill passed the House of Representatives and was a mere five votes short of the 60 votes necessary to pass the Senate; the *DREAM Act* failed to become law once more in spite of all the efforts across the nation (American Immigration Council, 2019). Undocumented youth were disappointed by the loss, but the loss served to fuel more aggressive campaigns to put pressure on the Obama administration. Young people across the nation continued with public acts that called attention to their plight (Altschuler, 2011).

By 2011, the National Immigration Youth Alliance (NIYA), a splinter organization from United We Dream, formed to address some of the divergent needs that began to surge in the bigger organization. The grassroots campaigns continued and in June of 2012, President Obama issued Executive Order *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals* (DACA, 2012). Created and presented by then Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, DACA, provided temporary relief to hundreds of thousands of eligible undocumented immigrants who had been in the United States since they were children (Altschuler, 2010; American Immigration Council, 2019). DREAMers all throughout the country celebrated the win, even if the Act simply provided them with liminal status and no pathway to permanent residency or citizenship (Perez Huber, 2015). Through United We Dream, a national organization with a clear mission and values to inform its work, DREAMers have continued to permeate the public consciousness and have not let up on their struggle for immigration reform.

With the election of President Trump in 2016, came more draconian measures and the announcement on September 5, 2017 by Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Elaine Duke (she resigned in April of 2018) rescinding the 2012 DACA memorandum and disallowing any

additional applications for the program (Kopan, 2018a). On January 9, 2018 a judge in California blocked Trump's termination of DACA and in February 13, 2018 a federal judge in New York issued a preliminary injunction against Trump's abrupt termination of DACA. Renewals were still accepted although no new applications could be filed (American Immigration Council, 2019; Kopan, 2018a).

While that injunction was being resolved and made its way to the Supreme Court, there were two important legal and legislative battles that continued to draw the organizing action of DREAMers. The first was the injunction placed on possible extensions of DACA and the *Dream and Promise Act* (DAPA, 2019), a policy that would help the parents of DACA recipients, which began in a Texas court. The decision made it to the Fifth Circuit court which upheld the Texas federal judge's injunction, and then ended in the 2016 Supreme Court's deadlock 4-4 decision, which upheld the Fifth Circuit's decision. Thus, the expansion of DACA and DAPA remains in limbo (American Immigration Council, 2019). On the legislative front, DREAMers continued to advocate for Congressional action and in June 2019 the House of Representatives passed the *Dream and Promise Act* which contained provisions that would help DACA recipients, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders and others have a path to permanent residency and citizenship. On the United We Dream website a staff member shared: "For the first time in nine years, we passed legislation through a chamber of Congress that protects immigrants and does not increase enforcement harms. And the coolest thing about it is that many provisions were created by immigrant youth ourselves" (Abrar, 2019, para. 3). Additionally, Abrar (2019) explained the next steps in the legislative process offering a road map to the activism needed and a call to action "because we know that our liberation is not tied to any one piece of legislation,

we will keep organizing and building until all of our people can live without fear and thrive" (para. 12).

The power in this new wave of activism by DACA recipients and DREAMers in general was the inclusion of all undocumented youth and the refusal of these young people to allow the dominant narrative to differentiate them from other immigrant-origin youth like unaccompanied youth as less deserving than they are (Perez Huber, 2015; Abrar, 2019). According to Perez Huber (2015) much of the media has portrayed DREAMers and DACA recipients as innocent children worthy of help because of their age when they entered the United States and their access to schooling. They are decriminalized while their parents are criminalized for bringing children into the country illegally. On the other hand, unaccompanied youth from Central America are often portrayed, not as innocent children or youth, but as criminals who do not deserve any assistance.

The exaltation of some immigrants over others makes it easier for other institutions, including universities, to narrowly focus on supporting DREAMers and DACAmented students without having to address their other undocumented students or the communities in which students live under fear of deportation and legal violence (Menjivar & Abrego, 2012) ensued by exclusionary and racist policies (Liou et al., 2017; Perez Huber, 2015; Waters, 2019; Yoshikawa et al., 2016). There has also been a growing demand for other immigrant voices, like those of undocumented Asian Americans to join the movement and unapologetically describe their conditions and contributions (Do, 2019). Movements like United We Dream strive for the creation of spaces that serve the larger good and the larger society, where the ink of citizenship is always interrogated to prevent the continuation of racist practices that allow for the failed

citizenship of marginalized native-born populations as well as those of immigrants (Banks, 2019; Patel, 2017). The election of President Biden has brought forth a renewed sense that immigration reform may be on the horizon, although some are skeptical about the power of the first executive orders to truly dismantle the reign of terror that was created by President Trump (Aguilera, 2021; Shear & Kanno-Youngs, 2021; White House, 2021).

Part IV

Activism and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR): Foregrounding Youth Voice and Agency

What remains largely absent from the literature is the voices of unaccompanied youth, especially in the schooling process. Although some sources include student narratives or interviews, there needs to be more information that comes directly from the unaccompanied youth themselves, rather than interpretations made by well-meaning adults (Acuña & Escudero, 2016; Bang, 2012; Cardoso et al., 2019; Heidbrink, 2014; Jaffee, 2016; Martinez, 2016; Nazario, 2014; Oikonomidoy, 2014; Pierce, 2016; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008; Suro, 2019; Tello et al., 2017). Unaccompanied youth as survivors of treacherous journeys across countries reach a certain level of sophistication as the adventurers of the twenty first century and cosmopolitans who have often lived in three different countries by the time they come to the United States. Unaccompanied youth can certainly present their own narratives and advocate for the resources they most desire to thrive in their new land (Bhabha, 2019; Cardoso et al., 2019; Oikonomidoy, 2014; Patel, 2013b).

More scholars are advocating for additional research on unaccompanied youth as a sub-group of immigrants, but through a lens that showcases their agency to make important decisions

about their own lives, including participation in research endeavors and acknowledging the migrant experience through open discourse (Aganza et al., 2019; Cardoso et al., 2019; Heidbrink, 2014; Menjívar & Perreira, 2019; Ozer & Piatt, 2017; Santelli et al., 2017). Many of these same scholars point to the participatory nature of YPAR as a most suitable manner to conduct research with these adolescents who through experience, do not fit the Western models of adolescent development or the idea that they need 'protection' because they cannot make their own decisions. Santelli et al. (2017) advocated for a shift to view adolescents not as subjects of research but agents of research, and to move from the dichotomy of inclusion versus protection to inclusion with protection. Furthermore, listening to adolescents should be part of the research priority setting process, thus acknowledging and respecting communities in general.

The call for action in YPAR begins with a focus on self-definition and reflection, acknowledgement of one's experience as the *point de départ* and genesis for resistance. For a process of self-definition that leads to social action, Black feminist thought offered a theoretical framework that enriched the rationale for utilizing YPAR as a methodology in this study. In Black feminist thought, Collins (1991) argued that African American women intellectuals have a long legacy of scholarly work that is often merged with knowledge that is every-day and taken-for-granted because it was not produced within the academy by a legitimate scholar, a code word for White or White and male scholar. African American women intellectuals, from Zora Neale Hurston to Alice Walker, "remain outsiders within, individuals whose marginality provides a distinctive angle of vision on the theories put forth by such intellectual communities" (Collins, 1991, p. 12). This outsider within status fosters a "reclamation process. Stimulated by the knowledge that the minds and talents of our grandmothers, mothers, and sisters have been

suppressed, the task of reclaiming Black women's subjugated knowledge takes on special meaning for Black women intellectuals" (Collins, 1991, p. 13). In the same vein, Critical Race methodology seeks to contest master narratives and provide counter-narratives that are crafted by those who are marginalized to resist overt and covert racism. YPAR methodology draws from black feminist thought, critical youth studies, and CRT to enact transformative inquiry that results in social action.

In this study, youth researchers and the principal investigator as immigrants from Central America, embarked on a journey to self-define and to reclaim the narrative around immigrant-origin youth, particularly unaccompanied youth to break the dichotomy of deserving versus undeserving immigrants. The goal was to articulate unaccompanied youth school experiences through youth epistemology, to counter the current dominant narrative about these young men and women. Much like in Black feminist thought, for unaccompanied youth participating in this project, the work has resulted in self-definition, which leads to resistance and independence, which leads to social action. YPAR as a methodology allows communities to heal themselves and decide for themselves what they need and want, not without challenges but with a problem-solving orientation that can resist the current ways in which communities are put under siege (Bethancourt et al., 2019; Buckley-Marudas, 2018; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Cardoso et al., 2019; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Fine, 2016; Fine, 2018; Mirra et al., 2016; Nishida & Fine, 2014; Ozer & Piatt, 2019; Sandwick et al., 2018; Santelli et al., 2017).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Since 2014 more than 200,000 unaccompanied youth from Central America have come into the United States according to data from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS, 2019a). The majority of unaccompanied youth originate from the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, with Guatemalan youth comprising the largest percentage (DHS, 2019b; Pierce, 2015; Rosenblum & Ball, 2016). Unaccompanied youth travel by themselves from their countries of origin and were generally processed through the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). This research study was focused on the epistemology of unaccompanied youth vis-à-vis their school experiences to help inform more emancipatory and just educational practices to support them.

The first chapter presented background information on this population of students and the challenges public schools encounter to serve their academic and socio-emotional needs. The second chapter presented a review of the literature to contextualize schooling in general through a Critical Race Theory lens. The CRT lens demonstrated the racialized nature of schooling in the United States and the precarious status students of color, including immigrants from the Global South, have always had in the project of schooling (Bernal, 2002; Cardoso et al., 2019; Drake, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2012; Lopez, 2003; Patel, 2013a, 2013b, 2017, 2018; Sablan, 2019; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). This study was in essence about a marginalized group of students of color for whom the intersection of race, ethnicity, language, immigrant status, immigration journeys, and low socio-economic status mattered and defined how school systems viewed them and ultimately educated them.

Methodology

Three fundamental facets of research—epistemology, methodology, and method—provide the framework for planning and implementing this qualitative study. Harding (1987) defined methodology as a theory and analysis of how research should proceed. Methodology provides justification for the methods of a research project. Methods are techniques for gathering evidence. Methods can be thought of as research action. In the simplest terms, methodology justifies method, which produces data and analyses. Knowledge is created from data and analyses. Epistemology modifies methodology and justifies the knowledge produced (Harding, 1987). In this study the epistemology of unaccompanied youth produced knowledge around schooling experiences. The research questions guiding this study were:

- How do unaccompanied youth, in the role of youth co-researchers describe, experience, and make meaning of *educación* at a justice-focused high school in Los Angeles?
- How can the epistemology of unaccompanied youth inform practices and policies, to ensure a socially-just education, against the backdrop of an anti-immigrant climate?

In order to highlight 'unaccompanied youth' epistemology, this study was grounded in two distinct methodologies: Critical Race Methodology and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). While the history of YPAR and CRT has evolved separately, there is much theoretical overlap between the two. Torre (2009) highlighted that while YPAR and CRT have emerged from different intellectual and activist traditions they share a set of theoretical, ethical and methodological principles and practices fundamental to both. She highlighted the following four commitments:

- To expand notions of expert knowledges,
- To recognize that individuals have multiple, overlapping, potentially conflicting, identities, loyalties and allegiances,
- To complicate identity categories, and
- To make the political nature of knowledge production explicit.

This study was anchored in both methodologies, Critical Race Methodology and YPAR, to create research spaces with and for unaccompanied youth—through data collection, storytelling, analysis, presentation, and action. The convergence of CRT and YPAR provided a methodological space to foreground the following principles: (1) the notion of expert knowledges and (2) the recognition that individuals have multiple, overlapping, potentially conflicting identities, loyalties, and allegiances (Torre, 2009). The immigrant-origin students in this study were strategically positioned to report and describe the salient elements of their schooling experiences because they possessed expert knowledge about the school and the impact of its policies and practices. The students' complex identities surged through the data to show potentially conflicting categories that the youth navigated with a high level of fluidity, countering the master narrative about young migrants from the global South as criminals, lazy, or a burden on the system. Journeying through the data via the commitments shared by CRT and YPAR allowed for a rich picture to emerge; the images conjured through the stories confirm the significance of student voice in any educational endeavor. Youth agency and autonomy produced knowledge about what issues and practices impacted the students' educational journeys including how the school and the youth approached knowledge, language development, identity, scholarship, peer relations, and transformational practices.

Students' self-awareness informed their unapologetic stance about their immigrant status. Co-researcher Michelle stated: "We don't have to explain our existence to anyone but I can talk about the contributions immigrants make." Here, Michelle offered a poignant statement that although she did not owe an explanation to anyone about who she is, or what her story represents, she was willing to engage in that conversation—not for her benefit, but for the benefit of the audience. At this point in the interview, she was about to share what she would tell President Trump about young immigrants, especially in light of remarks he has repeatedly made about immigrants from Central America and Mexico:

> But I think, I think it would be important for him to know, for him to know a little of the history, to go in depth, and see how the situation really is. I believe that it is a lack of knowledge and of seeing the reality, for him. I would tell him to study a little more about how the situation really is.

Michelle offered an option for the President to study and learn more about immigrants and the immigrant experience before making generalizations and erroneous, offensive, racist remarks. She strategically put the burden on him to learn more, assuming positively that his anti-immigrant attitude was fueled by ignorance and a refusal to see the reality of the situation. Thus, we see the youth grapple with complex issues with discernment and precision. This precision is part of their expert knowledge regarding their own identities, schooling experiences, and context. Their narrative gifts offered a look into how their school supported their journeys and ideas about what the educational community can do to ensure a socially-just education in an anti-immigrant climate. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) defined critical race methodology:

> as a theoretically grounded approach to research that (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process and challenges the separate discourses on race, gender, and class by showing how these three elements intersect to affect the experiences of students of color; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories

> used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color; furthermore, it views these experiences as sources of strength; and (e) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of color. (p. 12)

Given the current xenophobic and nativist anti-immigrant rhetoric negatively depicting unaccompanied youth, the counter stories from these students presented a contrasting notion about who they are as human beings, as migrants from the Global South, and as students of color in an urban school. Critical Participatory methodologies represented an ideal pathway to these counter narratives.

Youth Participatory Action Research to Operationalize Youth Epistemology

YPAR operationalized youth epistemology to justify the knowledge produced. YPAR situated unaccompanied adolescents as persons and rights-holders with the agency to self-define, resist hegemonic responses to their very existence, and strive for social change (Buckley-Marudas, 2018; Fine et al., 2016; Santelli et al., 2019). Santelli et al. (2017) advocated for: (1) a reframing of adolescents from vulnerable populations, like unaccompanied youth, not as subjects of research but agents of research; and (2) a shift from the dichotomy of inclusion vs. protection, to inclusion with protection. Within YPAR, critical youth studies contend that young people "have the capacity and agency to analyze their social context, to engage critical research collectively, and to challenge and resist the forces impeding their possibilities for liberation" (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 4). Furthermore, in YPAR methodology there is never a lone researcher, but rather a collective of researchers that is often multigenerational. Another important element is that the researchers are more or less insiders or stakeholders in the context under study. YPAR project researchers tend to adhere to CRT tenets, especially the concept of

intersectionality, in this case of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and immigration status. The knowledge gained from the project was critical in nature as it interrogated power dynamics that exist to oppress and suppress the voices of marginalized youth.

YPAR knowledge is active: "Research findings become launching pads for ideas, actions, plans, and strategies to initiate social change. This final difference distinguishing PAR from traditional research is critical epistemology that redefines knowledge as actions in pursuit of social justice" (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 6). The epistemology of these young migrants, who grapple with the intersectionality of factors historically used to marginalize students of color, proffered a clear picture of the emancipatory practices at their current school and offered suggestions for other educational institutions. Their rich knowledges gifted the field with specific ways in which schools can design spaces for immigrant-origin students that assist them in achieving their dreams by affirming their complicated identities. Insufficient research has been conducted that provides rich and thorough descriptions of how the unaccompanied youth identity influences the schooling experience for these youth. This study aimed to fill in that gap.

Methods

The research questions centered youth voice and the methodologies allowed for that voice to construct the research process and adapt to the changing circumstances under the COVID-19 pandemic. With school closures came the loss of a physical space to conduct the project, but the youth moved forward onto virtual spaces to complete the project and thus re-affirmed their agency and resilience. In spite of the necessary pivots to accommodate the difficulties brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021, the collaboratively co-constructed interview protocol the youth designed, still allowed for rich narratives to emerge

from the virtual interviews. The richness of the answers revealed a whole universe of educational exchanges happening in classrooms, with teachers and peers, in multilingual contexts, and in a highly dialogical manner. Analysis of school documents, field notes, and research team meeting notes supplemented the student interview data by providing additional information about the school and the evolution of the project, which helped to triangulate the data.

Setting

The study took place in a public school in the metropolitan area of Los Angeles, in a neighborhood that serves as an important entry point for recent immigrants. The school is a university-partnered public school. The school opened its doors in 2009 and serves about 1,000 students grades TK-12. According to school mission and vision documents, the school expects students to enter the adult world as confident and capable human beings, prepared to succeed in college, pursue meaningful careers, and participate in our democracy. In addition, the school vision calls for all the adults involved at the school to know the students well and support their development by helping them find their passions and to cultivate students' (a) passion to learn, (b) mastery of academic content, (c) bilingualism and multiculturalism, and (d) active and critical participation in society.

The school is predominantly Latino (81%) and Asian (10%), which contrasts with state demographics that reflect a 55% Latino student population and a 9% Asian student population. About two-thirds of the residents in the school's neighborhood are foreign-born, primarily from Central America, Mexico, Korea, the Philippines, and Bangladesh—among the highest percentage of immigrants in Los Angeles. Ninety-two percent of the students qualify for free or reduced meals which points to a high percentage of low-income families. English Learners also

categorized as emerging bilinguals comprise 29% of the student population, compared to 19% at the state level. The student homeless population is 7% compared to 3% at the state level. In spite of the challenges in the community the school has increased its four-year cohort graduation rate from 70% in 2012 to 84% by 2018. Students who are unable to graduate in four years are welcomed to stay an additional semester or year to graduate. This practice showcased the school's commitment to meeting student needs. The college going rate is also high, hitting 100% for the class of 2018, when all graduating students enrolled in a community college or four-year university.

In the 2019-2020 school year there were 50 full-time teachers. The teacher population was 58% Latino, compared to 21% in the state. Asian teachers comprised 26% of the staff compared to 6% in the state. The vast majority of teachers, 85%, were bilingual in Spanish, Korean, or Mandarin, with 4% of staff being trilingual (English, Spanish, and Korean). Teachers work very hard to improve their practice with 69% of the faculty holding Master's degrees. Teachers work collaboratively in grade-level or department alike structures. Eight Lead Teachers, three administrators, and one coordinator make up the school's leadership team which supports, develops, and delivers professional development to the entire school staff. Six years ago, the school developed a full inclusion plan for students with disabilities and thus eradicated all Special Day classes which isolated students. Five years ago, the school created a Newcomer Taskforce to collaborate on programming and supports for immigrant youth, particularly unaccompanied youth. One of the actions propelled by the taskforce was the creation of an elective course for newcomer students where they receive additional support to adapt to the school, connect to local resources, and receive academic assistance.

As a small high school, the school tries to offer a variety of courses to students through an electives program called seminars. All students also have access to honors courses in English and History. Advanced placement courses in English, Spanish, Capstone Research, and Studio Art are also open to all students. Through partnerships with local community colleges, students have the opportunity to take college classes concurrently.

Parents are actively engaged in the school as leaders on decision-making bodies like the School Governance Council, volunteers in classrooms, supervision assistants, and as sources of knowledge supporting interdisciplinary community-based projects. During the last WASC accreditation process in 2019, parents were active members of all sub-committees and supported the process by sharing their experiences with the school. The university assistance is through research-practice-partnerships that help improve instructional programs, develop new programs, or assist in the creation of local assessments. University partners also sit on the School Governance Council and are embedded in the work of the school.

The entire school community collaborates to materialize a different vision of what public schooling can look like within a distributive and social justice leadership paradigm. The reflective nature of the school has allowed it to continuously examine its practices vis-à-vis their impact on students and families. The school endeavors to be adaptive and responsive to the community needs.

Participants: Co-researchers

In Youth Participatory Action Research young people closest to the experience being studied carry out the research project alongside a principal investigator or researcher. Purposive sampling allowed the principal investigator to select a group of participants that could provide

insight into the experiences of unaccompanied youth in schools. Purposive sample allows a researcher to select participants that are closest to the phenomenon or issue being studied (Mills et al., 2012; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The main researcher taught the youth co-researchers which gave her access to the students as well as first-hand knowledge about their experiences.

The co-researchers were current students at the site and were recruited from a research course where they were learning how to conduct research. Through the Advanced Placement (AP) Research Capstone course the co-researchers studied theoretical frameworks, research methodologies including PAR, and core concepts surrounding race, equity, and intersectionality. As part of the recruitment plan, the co-researchers were presented with the realistic time commitment and necessary responsibilities of being a co-researcher. Initially these responsibilities included meeting for (a) one hour per week within the school day, (b) one two-hour long meeting per month at the school site, and (c) additional times to be determined by the group. Students volunteered to participate and were aware that they could opt out of the project at any time. The parameters set for the research team were essential for the completion of the project, but the team also had to adapt to the circumstances brought on by the pandemic. These decisions were done collaboratively. Mirra et al. (2016) asserted that adult involvement in YPAR does not take away from youth agency. "Setting young people off on a research project without access to the resources, knowledge, and relationships that adults can provide can do a disservice to YPAR by denying students the necessary tools to reap the full benefits" (Mirra et al., 2016, p. 39). Thus, working within a bounded research system supported the young co-researchers throughout the process.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the way in which the group worked together. Before the pandemic resulted in school closures, the team would meet during, before, and after school. There were more opportunities for conversations within and around the school schedule. After the school closure, all meetings moved to the web conferencing application Zoom (Zoom, 2021, www.zoom.us). Meeting duration shifted from a range of 60 to 90 minutes per week. Almost all the participants had to work more hours outside of school to make up for job losses among their families. The additional responsibilities for the youth co-researchers meant that team meetings were moved around to different days of the week to accommodate work schedules. The principal investigator kept field notes of the meetings and wrote analytic memos based on the research meetings. Interviews were conducted via Zoom or WhatsApp application (2020, web.whatsapp.com) video call. The interviews were recorded using QuickTime audio recording (2020, www.apple.com) on the principal investigator's computer to protect the data.

The youth co-researchers met the following criteria: (a) they would have all been categorized as unaccompanied migrants/refugees from Central America (before major changes brought on by the Trump administration in 2017), (b) they experienced detention by immigration agencies (although one was not detained by immigration enforcement) (c) they endured extended family separations and (d) they had been at the school for over twelve months. The amount of time in the country was an important consideration because the study necessitated co-researchers who had gone through various stages of adaptation to their new land, with a fuller understanding of the immigrant experience. All students recruited were young adults, 18 years of age or older. The following table shows demographic information about the co-researchers and participants. Short narratives about each youth researcher are provided to familiarize the reader with each

member of the team. Member checks were conducted to ensure the accuracy of the short descriptions.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Co-researchers and Participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Country of Origin	Role	Current Student/Alumnus
Alex	18	Honduras	Co-Researcher	Current Student
Hernan	19	Guatemala	Co-Researcher	Current Student
Jose	19	El Salvador	Co-Researcher	Current Student
Michelle	19	Guatemala	Co-Researcher	Current Student
H.M.I.	21	Mexico	Participant	Alumnus
Kevin	22	Guatemala	Participant	Alumnus

Alex

Alex was a quiet young man who loves art and dreams of being an art teacher and tattoo artist. On his arm there is a detailed tattoo of several majestic leafless trees. He fondly spoke of music and art festivals he enjoyed in Honduras. He was the youngest in his family and the last sibling to join the family in the United States. He had a very close relationship with his mother and was a natural storyteller. Alex enjoyed social media outlets and keeps up with the news, particularly in Spanish outlets. He was very analytical and loved to consider multiple perspectives and debate controversial topics.

Hernan

Hernan was an optimistic young woman whose positive outlook is contagious. She had a wonderful sense of humor and has a gift for using words in a poignant way. Her Christian faith was an important part of her life and she loved being active in her church. She was a diligent student, dedicated to learning and expanding her understanding of the world. She loved to meet

new people and to interact with people from different countries and backgrounds. Hernan loved helping others and sharing her gifts with the world. During discussions her questions added depth and nuance to the conversation. Hernan was very proud of her Mayan roots and her first language K'iche'. She was focused on achieving her college dreams. She has worked full time throughout her high school career in a variety of jobs.

Jose

Jose was a responsible young man who taught himself to play the guitar by watching YouTube videos. He then taught other peers how to play. He was kind and compassionate and very self-aware. He loved taking buses and metro trains to explore the city. He often had to work on weekends or miss school if he was called in to work. From a car wash service to local restaurants, he was constantly searching for more fulfilling employment opportunities. Jose missed his mom very much and had to let go of things like celebrating birthdays since he came to the United States. He was always willing to learn and loved being surrounded by different languages, cultures, and experiences.

Michelle

Michelle was a brilliant scholar and researcher whose faith and Mayan indigenous roots informed her approach to life and school. She was highly compassionate and empathetic. Her first language was K'iche' and she was very proud to be trilingual. During her time at a detention center, she recalled the guards saying the most humiliating things to the detainees; but Michelle always found the strength to repel the derogatory comments and hold on to her humanity. She has exceled in every content area at school and become an active member of the community.

Five years ago, she set out on a journey to fulfill her educational dreams and she has been doing just that every day since.

Participants: Unaccompanied Youth

The additional participants were all unaccompanied youth who were alumni from the site. All participants were 18 years of age or older. Participants were recruited utilizing purposive and snowball sampling; snowball sampling is a method in which participants recommend other similar participants to take part in the study in order to gain a larger pool (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The criteria included (a) being an unaccompanied youth from Central America or Mexico (b) being enrolled at the school or an alumnus/alumna of the school and (c) being identified as someone who could articulate and expand on both migration and schooling experiences. Due to the school closure caused by the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic, it was very difficult to work with this vulnerable population of students. Many disengaged from school and it was a challenge to contact them. The co-researchers also felt it might be best to work with alumni who did not face the same schooling and work pressures given the pandemic. The alumni participants, who graduated a few years ago were easier to contact and access. All participants were selected for their ability to qualify and articulate their schooling experiences as unaccompanied youth. All participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and in no way could negatively or positively affect their standing in the community. Participants were informed through multiple ways that they had the option to opt out of the project at any time. Following are the short narratives describing the two participants.

H.M.I.

He selected the H.M.I. pseudonym because each letter represents a part of his identity. He was born in a mountainous town in Oaxaca and early on realized he was going to have to leave his beloved country and family to survive. His determination to succeed and to achieve his dreams was an inspiration to all. He retook courses, made room for tutoring despite his grueling work schedule, and played soccer every lunch period. He loved learning about other cultures and languages. H.M.I saw food as a cultural expression and dreamed of opening a Oaxacan restaurant that will serve authentic dishes and also fusions of what he has come to experience in his new home in Los Angeles. The day of his graduation he wore the biggest smile and took pictures with teachers and friends.

Kevin

Kevin was the poet of the group. He had dozens of journals filled with powerful words that speak of home, of running to school as a child, of coming to terms with an estranged relationship with his father, of the love for his mother, of corn fields, of loneliness, and of dreams deferred and accomplished. Kevin had to learn Spanish when he arrived at the school. His first language was Mam, a Mayan language from Guatemala. He has always been a hard worker. Sponsoring his younger brother to join him in the United States was a motivating force in everything he did, that goal was his *raison d'être*. The day he enrolled his brother at the school everyone who knew him, teachers and peers, came to greet him and meet his little brother. Kevin's tenacity and sense of purpose was admired by all who worked with him.

Procedures

Recruitment of Co-researchers

Co-researchers were recruited for their immigrant experience and their enrollment in a research course that prepares students to conduct research projects. Purposive sampling allowed the main investigator to recruit students who met certain criteria.

Recruitment of Participants

Youth co-researchers and the principal investigator used purposive and snowball sampling to recruit alumni from the school who were able to describe their schooling experiences based on their positionality as migrants. Students were recruited through the school's alumni network.

YPAR Methods

As part of YPAR, the methods of the study were co-constructed with youth. The co-researchers contributed to the research with their personal experiences and adapted methods to meet the challenges brought on by the pandemic. The research methods included:

- The Project Set Up: Research team meetings, discussions, and reflections to anchor the learning and launch the research project,
- Three-part individual interviews: Counter-narratives,
- Document analysis of school documents,
- Plan of Action.

The YPAR Project Set Up: A Course, Discussions, and Reflection

YPAR methodology looks different across projects because each context is unique. This section outlines the preparation for the youth to be able to carry out the research project and the changes that were implemented due to the pandemic.

Research Course

During the 2019-2020 school year the fourth co-researchers were enrolled in an elective research course that focused on the purpose of research, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies. The youth conducted short research studies on topics of interest applying a particular theoretical framework. Most studies were reviews of literature on a topic. The principal investigator joined the course occasionally as a way to support the students and gain a better sense of what they were learning. To compliment the course students met after school to read additional articles on CRT, YPAR, and studies about immigrant-origin students in schools. The readings were prefaced by check-ins and informal discussions about the students' lives and experiences.

Research Team Meetings

The research team meetings served to co-create the interview protocol and agree on recruitment efforts. As the pandemic resulted on school closures these meetings were moved to virtual spaces like Zoom and WhatsApp video calls. In order to capture the richness of the discussion and to maintain a similar format, the team kept agendas and notes on Google Slides and Google docs. The meetings always started with a centering activity like a short meditation or a quick reading of an inspirational story or quote. Students always had a lot to share about their lives, especially about the impact the pandemic was having on their families.

During the data analysis phase the meetings included reviewing transcripts together, sharing ideas about the emergent themes, and discussing how these codes and then themes mapped onto the CRT and YPAR frameworks the team was using for the study. The meetings were scheduled around the students' school and work schedules, which changed often. The meetings added to the sense of collegiality in the team; the co-researchers and principal investigator became *colegas*, colleagues working towards a common purpose.

Participatory Observations

The study was grounded in qualitative methods of data collection – semi-structured interviewing, participant observation, and document analysis. The principal investigator utilized participant observation as a method to collect data about the co-researchers, the processes, and cultures that emerged through YPAR. Participant observation took place for an extended period of time, allowing for the observation of more cultural nuances (Maxwell, 2012). Fieldnotes documented direct observation, collective discussions, group text messages, analyses of personal documents produced within the group, and self-analysis.

Group meetings proved to be a critical site for data collections. The principal investigator documented all the meetings and reflected on the process. She wrote analytic memos about each of these meetings to help her reflect on the evolution of the project and the development of the youth as researchers. The reflective process enriched her own understanding of how these youth were experiencing and interpreting school. She observed and documented the youth's growth as budding researchers who were not only understanding theoretical frameworks but enacting changes in their own context. The agentive aspect of YPAR was palpable every step of the process. Sometimes the questions the youth raised warranted additional readings and research on

the part of the principal investigator. She would then share what she was reading and learning with the team to advance and deepen the work.

In sum, YPAR was a reflexive research design. The research design developed as the research progressed. Components of the design were reconsidered or modified in response to new developments or to changes in some other component. The activities of collecting and analyzing data, developing and modifying findings, refocusing the research questions, were usually all going on more or less simultaneously, each influencing all of the others.

Virtual Tools

Moving the entire study to a virtual setting created challenges for the team. However, the youth and principal investigator were creative in the tools they used to share their work and complete the study. The Google suite was of utmost use for the team. In addition, the Padlet web application (2020, www.padlet.com) was used to code data and brainstorm themes that emerged from the data. In order to protect the data all documents were password protected and could only be accessed by those conducting the study. In some ways, the virtual setting allowed the team to have more collective data analysis experiences that might have been harder to create in a physical space. The virtual tools also made documenting a collective and shared experience.

The Interview Protocol: Counter-Narratives

Seidman (2013) recommended the use of a three-interview series, in order to delve deeply into the context and to establish trust with the participant. Interview one establishes the context of the participant's experience. Interview two allows the participant to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurred. Interview three encourages the participant to reflect on the meaning of the experience. For this project the youth co-researchers

and the principal investigator decided to merge the three parts into one interview. This adaptation facilitated the process given the limitations and time constraints caused by the pandemic. The interview protocol was semi-structured and co-constructed with youth researchers. A semi-structured interview protocol allows for more flexibility to ask follow-up questions (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The youth researchers and the principal investigator collaborated on the questions which fell into three major themes: (a) focused life history, (b) details of educational experiences, and (c) reflections on the meaning of the educational experiences. What was revealed early on was the exemplary capacity all the co-researchers possessed to conduct rigorous research and to grapple with complex issues and questions. CRT and YPAR extol the saliency of experiential knowledge on the part of minoritized and marginalized groups. In this case, the notion of expert knowledges also encompassed the youth's ability to engage in a researcher project. The next section is dedicated to their expert knowledges as youth researchers.

Youth as Researchers: Expert Knowledges

The immigrant-origin youth involved in this project engaged in difficult readings and rich discussions about the immigrant experience vis-a-vis their school's practices and policies. The protocol they developed helped the team gain insight into how students were moving across spaces in the schooling process. The protocol embodied the youth's natural inquisitive nature and capacity to create and showcase knowledge through participatory research. In fact, their experiential knowledge allowed for an interview experience that invited rich answers and thick descriptions of schooling. This section analyzes each segment of the protocol.

In the first section of the protocol the youth co-researchers included questions like *"¿Qué te inspiró a venir aquí?* What inspired you to come here?" Note the power of that question to

elicit responses that contextualized the interviewee's reasons for coming to the United States and connected that experience to the life they wanted for themselves in their new land. The power of the question demonstrated a high degree of agency among the youth, who based on their own experience, knew that there was a big, deep, nuanced story behind a fourteen- or fifteen-year-old's decision to leave their country of origin and traverse thousands of miles in search of a better life. And certainly, the responses to that first opening question were long, complex—full stories themselves.

Another question in the protocol invited participants to think about the advantages and disadvantages of coming and being in the United States, versus their country of origin, *¿Cuáles son las ventajas y desventajas que encuentras en USA comparado con tu país de origen? ¿Qué tal la escuela?* What are the advantages and disadvantages of being here in the USA, compared to your country? What about school? Through the comparative nature of these questions, the youth co-researchers allowed for rich discussions into the complexity of the immigration process. There are never simple answers; immigrants constantly grapple with difficult questions and challenges as they adapt to a new land and compare and contrast conditions as they navigate their new context.

The next set of questions centered around family and the questions speak to the layered and complicated nature of "family" for a young migrant who may or may not be coming to reunite with close relatives or parents. The questions included open-ended items like: *Platícanos sobre tu familia aquí en USA. ¿Cuántos hermanos tienes aquí, cómo te relacionas con ellos? ¿Tienes hermanos nacidos en USA?* Tell us about your family, do you have siblings, were they born here? The question allowed participants to explore all the different family members they

had lived with, starting with those to whom they were initially released from detention centers. The exploration of their family and guardian networks helped guide additional questions and informed the researchers of how important it was to consider the multiple variations of what constitutes family for these immigrant students. The second part of the family questions was much more provocative: *¿Qué espera tu familia de ti, de tu educación?* What does your family expect from you? From your education? With this question the co-researchers wanted to explore the indirect or direct pressure immigrant-origin youth may feel once they are here in the United States, vis-a-vis their families in their country of origin or here in the U.S.A. The youth know there is an expectation of monetary gains with work in their new land, but also of possibilities based on their education. Families here and back in their countries may not always understand the system of education and what is expected of students but there is an expectation of advancement, fulfillment, and benefit for the youth and their family. The answers again demonstrated a spectrum of experiences, but there was a common thread about the importance of taking advantage of opportunities. Answers also highlighted the connection to family and the mutual respect members hold for one another. The questions connected to the lived experiences of these youth as they reunited with older siblings, parents, or grandparents and navigated entirely new familial relationships that provided support in a broad sense, but not necessarily economic assistance to attend school without having to work and cover their own expenses.

In the next section of the protocol the questions focused on the school, the process for arriving at that particular school (based on the process of choice students go through), how teachers supported them, and how they learned English. Some of these questions revealed that students felt very fortunate about being at this particular school where they felt teachers and

peers supported their language, academic, and intellectual growth. The youth co-researchers were also interested in the influence of peer relations on the adaptation and learning process. Their questions invited reflection about how both immigrant-origin and U.S. born peers contributed to their educational journey. There was a genuine interest in shining light on the impact peers had had on the schooling experience and the answers demonstrated that the collaborative spaces teachers created in their classrooms aided everyone's learning. The first question in this section asked: *¿Cómo te recibieron tus compañeros cuando primero llegaste y cómo ha cambiado eso?* How did your peers receive you and how has your relationship with peers changed? The second question was: *¿Cómo te sientes al interactuar con otros estudiantes que no son inmigrantes?* How do you feel about interacting with other students who are not immigrants? The answers were once again thick descriptions of active, collaborative, translanguaging classrooms in different content areas.

Finally, the youth wanted to delve into the current anti-immigrant context in the United States. News outlets constantly cover stories of immigrant children and families in cages and in subpar detention centers where even members of Congress have witnessed or confirmed ill treatment of immigrants, sexual harassment, abuse, deaths, and now with COVID-19, conditions that foment the spread of the virus endangering the lives of thousands of immigrants (Castillo & Zou, 2020; Dickerson, 2019; Dreier, 2020). The co-researchers wanted to hear what the participants made of the politics and rhetoric surrounding immigration; their question was direct in asking about the impact of that negative attitude towards immigrants. *¿Cómo te afecta la política actual anti-inmigrante y que pinta negativamente a los inmigrantes?* How does the current anti-immigrant politics that portrays immigrants negatively affect you? This question

invited an examination and critique of the anti-immigrant climate and the responses revealed a deep understanding of the context with a surprisingly bold and positive attitude about immigrants and the future—even in the face of insults and dehumanizing policies on the part of immigration agencies.

Hernan lamented the view that the media and some people hold about immigrants and countered those portrayals with her experience:

> I think it is sad, and unfortunately always, one who is an immigrant sometimes others look down upon us, or feel that we can [not] obtain certain goals and do certain things; and we also do not have our free right to be able to do things that others can do, or as well as them, for example, some believe that we are not capable of achieving a good education and of being able to graduate from universities. That is sad and unfortunate, true, that they do not believe in us, or that they think that we do not have that capacity to be able to, to be able to excel. [Interviewer: And how does that affect you?] Well, the truth is that I feel that the way it affects me is simply that, I don't know, it makes me angry to hear that, and sometimes I'd rather not listen to it. But to say that it affects me badly, no, it does not, it is simply an emotion that I feel instantly, to hear that we are not able to achieve our goals. Yes, I think it is simply a small emotion, instantly, because as I say, I always try to be positive no? and no, and not listen to things that are not worthwhile, right? [Laughs]

Hernan chose to remain positive about who she was and to ignore the negative rhetoric to maintain her focus on her goals.

Jose was critical of both rhetoric and ill-willed action on the part of the current Trump administration; but he also criticized other administrations for using a kinder rhetoric while enacting cruel policies on immigrants:

> I think that the current policy has been a bit, well too much, too irresponsible, separating families, which is reprehensible, it can be said. But at the same time, we know that not all of them are perfect, because there are presidents who also maybe never, never sent that hateful message, but maybe what they didn't actually say with their mouths, they simply let things happen. I feel that this has affected our society a lot, mainly because people, white people sometimes have taken a great role in saying that we are, that we are a burden, or that we steal their jobs, but in reality, we have not stolen their jobs, those jobs. Because in reality we did not steal something which they did not do, those are hard jobs that they do not like to do, so I feel that this has strengthened our people, but it has also

> scared them. And I think that in the end there will be a, there will be light at the end of this tunnel, because it will not be forever that we are like this, that there is so much hatred.

Jose saw a light at the end of the tunnel of hatred and ill-devised policies. When asked about the anti-immigrant rhetoric Kevin also advanced the idea of humanism to honor each person's journey and history and repudiated the idea that for politicians, immigrants often represent pawns to be used for political gain without any regard for the impact policies have on real human beings:

> Well getting into politics, there are things that should change. The first is like the treatment they give you when you cross the border. I went through that, as they caught me and put me in an immigration detention center. Being there, seeing, feeling the sensation, having the sensation of how things are there, it is not a place where a person should be. And I think that for me that was an experience that I cannot forget, because it affected me a lot mentally. How to say this, there should not be, see, people, children, they are in conditions, with a very low temperature. For me, that destroyed me as a human, as a person. And see politics, now I am not so much in agreement with how they are doing things. Well, politicians, I am neither right nor left, but seeing how they play with the feelings of immigrants, for me that is not the right thing to do. They only use you as a token, to do things, for me that's no, that shouldn't be done. When you want to help someone you give the help, and that's it. And they only try to make things happen only for the people they care about, but, sometimes in reality, no. Because there have been, since, well, when I crossed the border things continue the same way. How many years ago? Six years, and I see the same cases that are happening. I see interviews of people on television, having the same feeling, the same story that one goes through, then it has not changed. So, it hasn't changed in that time and they just promise and promise and never give solutions. Watching the news, seeing people expressing, seeing the stories of people like that, and seeing how people still feel the same. Then politics for me, no, it hasn't helped much, seeing how things are. I think they don't know what a person's life is like, they don't know what an immigrant's life is like. They just try to play, as they take it as a game. I believe that the life of a human being cannot be taken that way.

Kevin denounced the ill treatment of immigrants: "a human being cannot be taken that way." He lamented that so little had changed from his time in a detention center, six years before to the current conditions of children in cages, in freezing temperatures, being harmed in indelible ways.

As evidenced by the questions in the interview protocol the youth had a powerful frame for conducting research—their own lived experiences as immigrant-origin youth in a public school. This research was framed by youth researchers whose questions elicited rich responses about schooling experiences, and more significantly affirmed the power of creating spaces where youth decide how to tell their stories.

The Interviews on Virtual Spaces

Both co-researchers and participants were interviewed. The interviews took place through WhatsApp video calls. The researchers and principal investigator obtained permission to audio record and to take field notes. The audio recordings were collected on Quicktime and kept on the principal investigator's computer for security. The interview included a quick introduction and a review of the informed consent form. All participants had signed the consent through a Google form before the interview. There was also an opportunity to ask questions before the interview. Participants were reminded that they did not have to answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable and that they had the option to stop the interview at any point. The interviews were transcribed using the application HappyScribe (2020, www.happyscribe.com) which provided transcripts in languages other than English. Transcripts were then edited to address the errors made by the application. The principal investigator listened to the audio and compared the audio to the text. The co-researchers also listened to the audio files and read the transcripts. The group read and viewed transcripts together as well to confirm consensus around codes and themes. All the interviews were conducted in Spanish, the preferred language of the co-researchers and participants. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants and co-researchers, no identifying information about the participants was used. Both co-researchers and

participants selected pseudonyms for the project. Transcripts and other files were kept in the principal investigator's computer under password protection. Virtual platforms facilitated the collaboration for the team during the school closures. All data was safeguarded with passwords and only the researchers conducting the study had access.

School Documents

The principal investigator reviewed and analyzed a variety of school documents including: (1) the mission and vision statement of the school, (2) documentation connected to the creation of the Newcomer Taskforce (the Taskforce is responsible for assessing the ongoing needs of immigrant-origin students, especially unaccompanied youth, and designing responses to those needs), (3) the curriculum created for the Newcomer Course/Seminar, an elective class for immigrant students to receive specialized services and academic support, (4) documents detailing the core practices of the teaching staff including The Social Justice Checklist, the Multicultural and Multilingual Teaching Framework, and the content of professional development for teachers and staff, and (5) meeting minutes of the English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC), a leadership body composed of parents of English Learners meant to monitor the progress of English Learners, also known as emerging bilinguals.

Data Analysis

The youth researchers and principal investigator followed a cyclical process of reviewing the data, asking what was significant, checking field notes, doing reflections, and connecting to personal educational experiences. There were also member checks to ensure the analysis was representative of what was shared during the interviews. The data-analysis discussions first followed an open inductive coding process and then a deductive process derived from the

framework selected for the project (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The convergence of CRT and YPAR via the shared commitments advanced by Torre (2009) helped the team map what they were learning from the data back to the framework. The analysis was done in three stages. The fourth stage was focused on the actionable piece of the research process.

Stage I: Open and Inductive Codes

The team first read and analyzed the transcripts allowing for an inductive process. The most salient factor at this stage of the process was the complicated identities the youth were referencing. Those identities permeated every aspect of how the youth were experiencing school. There was also an emphasis on language and translanguaging spaces. The team read an article on translanguaging to better understand what they were noticing in the data.

The principal investigator uploaded the transcripts to Dedoose (Version 8.3.47b, 2021 www.dedoose.com), a web application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative and mixed method research data and applied these codes to organize the data. Dedoose also allowed the addition of short notes or memos for each code. She also printed the transcripts and read them multiple times and listened to the audio files as her part of her own process to reflect on the findings. She also delved into translanguaging literature to better understand what the data was revealing in terms of open language spaces (thirdspaces) where students deployed their linguistic repertoires (Garcia, 2020; Garcia & Wei, 2014; Garcia & Kleyn, 2016; Garcia et al., 2017). She shared her learning with the team to further contextualize what the data was revealing about translanguaging spaces at the school.

There was also peer debriefing (Creswell, 2009) with a senior researcher to enhance the accuracy of the analysis and raise additional questions and options for the team. These

conversations enriched the analysis process and deepened the principal investigator's understanding of the data.

Stage II: Themes

The second and third iterations of the analysis led to themes that pointed to the youth's expert knowledges in approaching learning, pursuing their dreams, and the concept of connection at the school. The counternarratives revealed explicit knowledge about how the youth were leveraging their identities and knowledges to navigate the school and community contexts. For the youth, the research meetings allowed them to apply what they had learned through their research course, discuss salient themes in the data, and connect to their own experience.

The principal investigator continued clustering the data using the platform Dedoose and checking with the team. She continuously met with a senior researcher and mentor for peer debriefing to process the findings and the data analysis iterations. This space helped the principal investigator reflect and consult additional literature to better understand the third space the youth were describing and revealing. Readings included Anzaldúa (2000), Bernal (2000), Freire (2018), Collins (1991), Sandoval (2000), and Spivak (1998). The manner in which the youth navigated their identities as well as geographical boundaries and spaces in which they found themselves enriched the research process. The process of observing the youth co-researchers and reflecting on the team's research process was transformational for the principal investigator.

Stage III: Connecting to the Framework

The last stage of the data analysis was a return to the four commitments shared by CRT and YPAR posited by Torre (2009). At this point it was helpful to match data to (1) expert knowledges and (2) complicated identities. There were multiple iterations of this analysis and

mapping onto the framework. The principal investigator also consulted her mentor to sift through the most salient pieces and then returned to the research team with new insights. There was a cyclical approach to the analysis that helped the team reduce the data into its important pieces. There were also member checks when possible. The data collection and analysis conformed to the highest standards of qualitative research, using the common qualitative tools and technologies of triangulation, member checks, rich and thick descriptions, analytic memos, and audit trails (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Shenton, 2004).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021 was undeniable. Sharing a screen or dealing with connectivity issues changed the process for teamwork. Most young people do not like to turn on their cameras during Zoom sessions or video calls, thus interacting with voices originating from black tiles added another layer of complexity to the research project and process. However, because the team had built close relationships over time, the young co-researchers would often turn on their camera at the end of a meeting and informally greet each other or add an observation they had not yet shared. There were also some unexpected benefits to the pandemic like the ease with which a meeting could be convened through a virtual platform regardless of time or locale.

Stage IV: Planning for Action

One of the main tenets of CRT theory and methodology is its commitment to social justice action aimed at ending racism, exclusion, and subjugation (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). This YPAR project was no exception. Initially the youth were focused on a desire to share their findings with teachers as a way to affirm what was transpiring in classrooms, but also to offer ideas about how to make improvements. There was also a sense

of urgency to share the experiences of immigrant youth, especially unaccompanied youth with the broader community. The pandemic complicated some of the actions the team wished to take. After some discussion the team developed the idea of having a student advisory board at the school to ensure that student voice was always reflected in the curriculum, instruction, and development of the school.

In the fall of 2020, the principal investigator sponsored the school's first Student Advisory Board, open to all secondary students, grades six through twelve. Nine students joined the board. The board has designed and conducted a couple of surveys to ascertain the impact of the pandemic on students, families, and teachers. They have led dialogues with teachers to share what students are experiencing in the pandemic. The student surveys helped inform more equitable grading practices. Students also wanted to hear how teachers were doing during the pandemic and the impact of virtual learning. Teachers overwhelmingly shared poignant stories about how difficult it was for teachers to navigate virtual teaching. This led students to create a "turn on your camera" campaign that sought to encourage secondary students to show their faces to their teachers and take the opportunity to express appreciation and gratitude in that way. The students also held focus groups for students as a follow up to the surveys. The ideas generated in the student advisory space coalesced with efforts by the school staff to create authentic spaces of healing, connection, and learning during virtual learning.

Interestingly, none of the youth co-researchers was able to join the Student Advisory Board, their work schedules and challenging circumstances made it very hard for them to participate. This points to the continued need to better understand the needs of vulnerable populations like unaccompanied youth and immigrant students in general. There will always be a

need for additional systemic changes. As Patel (2013b) urged us to consider: “Every day we live, work, talk, love, and play in societal structures. These moments are replete with opportunity to note and modify who is included and excluded in pursuit of a more equitable society” (p. 111). Schools must and can continuously confront who is being excluded even from seemingly well-intentioned, supportive practices.

Role of Principal Investigator

The principal investigator was the principal of the school where the study was conducted. She immigrated from Guatemala. The researcher grew up around the neighborhood of the site and attended nearby schools. Her commitment to her profession led her back to her old neighborhood. She has taught the co-researchers and the participants through the elective course that was created to support immigrant-origin youth at the site. All of these factors matter because the principal investigator was conscious of her lived experience and how it has influenced her approach as an educator. Her own immigrant experience inspired her commitment to support students who are immigrants. Being part of the school community afforded her the unique opportunity to work with students, teachers, and families to create a more welcoming environment for all students.

As was discussed earlier, in PAR the researchers are often insiders, stakeholders who have a direct connection to the site under study and the issues that need to be addressed through a collective and participatory inquiry project. Familiarity with the interview participants was of limited concern because the relationships among the group and participants contributed to an open and fluid atmosphere where co-researchers and participants spoke freely. There was a sense that their stories mattered for the school community as a whole and for other educational

agencies. In order to prevent participants from feeling obligated or coerced to participate because of their relationship with the researcher, the researcher made it clear that participation was entirely voluntary. Considering the impact of the pandemic on students, the principal investigator made sure that participants could easily decline to participate. The research team decided to focus on alumni for the interviews as current students were severely impacted by the pandemic and faced a lot of pressure. Conversations about power and positionality consistently played out throughout the research process. YPAR done properly requires not only the decentering of the power of the trained researcher but also the challenging of the power dynamics in the larger society (Cammarota & Fine, 2008).

Reliability and Validity

According to Creswell (2009) "qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and projects (Gibbs, 2007)" (p. 190). In this study reliability was sustained by adhering to the protocols and procedures that constitute Youth Participatory Action Research and Critical Race methodology. The co-researchers were enrolled in a course where they were introduced to how to conduct research and engage in a participatory inquiry project. In addition, through the meetings with the researcher, the youth co-researchers reviewed more specific components of the methods, like the three-part sequenced interview model presented by Seidman (2013).

For validity Creswell (2009) recommended strategies like triangulation, member checking, and rich and thick descriptions as a way to enhance the overall validity of a qualitative study. All these validity strategies were employed in this study as a way to ensure the

interpretation of the data and findings as valid and trustworthy. In participatory research there is also a process of checking with participants to ensure that what is being captured is not only representative of their experiences, but also accurately shaping the possible future actions to stem from the project. The use of platforms like Padlet allowed the team to check in with each other regarding the themes that emerged and the exact words and terms the team wanted to use to classify certain codes or categories.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This research study focused on the epistemology of unaccompanied youth to help inform more emancipatory and just educational practices to support them. The research question guiding this chapter is: How do unaccompanied youth, in the role of youth co-researchers describe, experience, and make meaning of *educación*, at a justice-focused high school in Los Angeles? The findings are inextricably connected to the students' complicated identities and expert knowledges around schooling, which are powerfully unearthed through a participatory methodology. How students describe or see schooling is done through their expert knowledges around issues of language and scholarship development in schools. Experiencing education for these youth happened through complicated identities where ethnicity, language, class, immigration status, and migration stories intersect. The interpretation of what schooling can signify points to the transformative spaces curated for students at the margins at the site of the research project. The chapter is organized around description, experience, and interpretation of schooling.

I. Descriptions of *Educación* through Expert Knowledges

The notion of expert knowledge and experiential knowledge seeks to foreground the power of the narratives of marginalized groups (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Torre, 2009). In this study, six young immigrants presented their knowledge about the project of schooling and how they experienced it through their multiple identities and lived experience. Their knowledges touched upon the pursuit of educational dreams, the process of learning, and the power of

connection. The school's pedagogical and instructional practices affirmed their identities and histories in ways that helped them remain focused on their educational dreams.

All six, both participants and co-researchers expressed their commitment to pursuing an education. Participants and co-researchers alike were all able to offer tangible examples of how they pursued intellectual endeavors and their process for learning a new language, new content, and a new land. Their pursuit of knowledge is highly dialogical; their identities of struggle inform how they view and interact with their various learning spaces and those spaces impact how the students themselves approach learning. Alex expressed his goals to study in this manner:

> What inspired me to come to the United States is, to get ahead, have a better future and since my mother and my brothers left, I came to study and to be the first of our, of the family, the first to go to a university and get ahead and be able have a better life than I had in my country. The advantage is that here is that, when one graduates from High School one can get help to go to university, even for free, getting a scholarship. And also Here, they value the High School diploma, a person, she can get a job and they will value her diploma. While in my country one can graduate, how to say, from high school and still, they give no value to [the diploma] what you studied, you have to work so hard to go to a university even a good one may not . . . it is hard to get hired.

Alex came to this country following his older brothers and mother. He is the youngest in the family and he wants to graduate high school and go to college because he feels his education will not only translate into learning but into tangible opportunities. He contextualized his desire by reiterating that in his country education does not translate into advancement unless you are well-connected already:

> Mostly those who graduate and think that they are going to have that [a job] in one's country, unfortunately in one's country, it is unfortunate and it is not like that, because one can have and say that with their degree they can go to work and say he has a degree, that he graduated; but mostly the jobs don't validate that. It only works out especially if the jobs you want, you have a cousin who works there or friends. But if you are new, unknown, it is difficult to be hired. Even when you really want the job, when you graduate from university, the same thing happens, you must have a person already in the job so you can get the job, that is how it happens.

Alex understands the limited opportunities in his country, regardless of level of education. His family did not have the connections to jobs or opportunities based on schooling. Alex is here ready to leverage his education. Alex understands education as currency that provides access to a career or a job. He also speaks to a deep desire to be the first in his family to achieve the dream of a college education. In positing the idea that accomplishments are valued, Alex revealed his own values about education. He values his accomplishments and welcomes being in a space where those accomplishments are valued as well.

Hernan added a similar statement: "I believe that like many of us, what inspired me to come to the United States was to have a better education, to receive a better education." Hernan first contextualized her pursuit of a quality education as a unifying factor among many immigrant youth. She then posited what she perceived as a different and better type of education she could access in this country. Hernan added:

> Also, at the school, I think there have been several opportunities that we [inaudible], like the teachers, the counselor always tells us that we must do certain things or join clubs so that we can be accepted in good universities or that this will always be valid in our record. I don't want to lose that vision and I want to reach my dreams I have. Although I know there will always be people who will perhaps attempt to block or dismiss that vision I have for myself, but I believe in staying with it and I know that one day I will be able to achieve my dreams and above all my ability to help my family as they are supporting me today.

Hernan was committed to her educational vision and was aware that there may be multiple obstacles to reach her goals but insisted on her resolve to educate herself for her own betterment and that of her family. She expressed a clear purpose in what she wishes to accomplish.

Jose, who immigrated from El Salvador, explained his own pursuit of education in the following way:

> My dad and I decided to come to the United States because there was a time when my family struggled economically and at the same time there was an environment where I did not know whether I was going to be able to study, even though I was enrolled in school, I thought I might not be able to do anything. Another reason was the violence in El Salvador, it was something so terrible, because I grew up with classmates who ultimately, well, at this moment are in prison and others are dead. I grew up in an environment that was very violent so to speak, everything around me was like that. Another reason was because I also felt that I needed to leave El Salvador. It was because I wanted to do something else, because I believed that I would never achieve anything, or have the chance to do something interesting. And also because I was attracted to the life in the United States that movies depicted. They make the United States look like it is a wonderland. Yes, again I know, that to make it to college, being the first in my nuclear family to go to an American university would represent a great privilege, but at the same time a great responsibility. So I'm still kind of nervous about facing my future.

Jose wanted to do more with his life and was afraid that he would not be able to achieve anything that mattered to him, in his home country. He also cited movies as a source of information about the United States knowing that what is represented makes things look as if there are no obstacles, and everything is wonderful. But he also appreciated that his goal of attending a university filled him with nerves, because he would be the first in his family to attend college in the United States and that was both a privilege and a responsibility. There is a weight to his statement that highlights the pressure these young men and women feel for the opportunity to be educated in US schools, while they also confront the harsh realities connected to other aspects of their identity, like being undocumented, that complicate that dream. Education is liberatory for a variety of reasons and the school where he enrolled allowed for him to express and act upon all his goals.

For Michelle the pursuit of education has been one of her defining characteristics, even as a very young girl:

> First of all, something that since I was little until, since I started school I have always, I believe that what inspires me most is continuing my studies, but not in the same manner as how I was studying. When I would watch movies on TV and then see how education

> was in the United States, and I would compare that with the education I was receiving and consider what I might receive if I came here. Then, I more or less realized that I wanted to continue my studies but in a different manner, way different. And that was my inspiration. And of course for my family. I have always observed the situation in our family and I have always wanted to help and the only way I can accomplish that is through education. I would see that in the United States there were many more advantages for me to continue studying and for that reason, I know that education inspired me to come.

Michelle placed education at the center of her decision to come to the United States because she intuited that the quality of that education would be different, when pressed about the difference, she spoke of the counselor who supported her and the content expertise her teachers possessed:

> It is so much, well, for me because I know that I had never before received so much support. The way in which I have been helped to learn English, to pass my classes; to always keep up with my classes, with my grades and when I am not doing well, or poorly then [Ms. X., counselor] always calls me when she sees something is going bad with my grades and I believe that is big for me. And you too, there is always someone monitoring.

Clearly, Michelle has encountered educational spaces that address her needs and match what she was seeking, a real opportunity to continue her studies. The response she received from her school deepened and fueled her commitment to stay focused and learn her new language and pass all her courses. Michelle sensed that the outcomes of her education in this country would positively impact her ability to help her family. There was a dialogical relationship being exposed, between her school and her. She has been influenced by the response from the school, but the school was also setting up certain conditions to help her thrive based on her history and trajectory.

The same sentiment was shared by H.M.I. who left his small town in Southern Mexico feeling he had no choice: “Then I could say that my American dream was to protect myself, to save my life, arrive here and have safety and security and be well in this country.” He situated his story among hundreds of other youth who are in search of the opportunity to start over in a

safe environment where they can entertain dreams and goals. Once he started school he realized that he did not have to give up his dream to continue his education:

> When I got here I remember the first days in this country and being in school, there were so many advantages, to learn about new cultures. I arrived on that first day and I was scared, I was hesitant to be there, I didn't want to meet new people. I mean the first day that is normal, but as I opened myself up I recognized the advantage of knowing new people who have different cultures, you begin to learn new cultures and that is a great advantage . . . here you go to school and they even feed you. They give you teachers who help you, they help you after school to do your homework. There are many advantages like having a library, you can ask for a book and take it home, bring it back, but over there [Oaxaca, Mexico] you have to buy the book, or rent it.

H.M.I. shared his enthusiasm upon discovering the access he would have to a library for example, to having meals at school, and especially to learn from other students who represented various cultures, different from his own. To him, having access to a different learning environment was highly motivating, especially during times when he questioned whether he could work full time and attend school full time. He explained later in the interview that he had to make a commitment to himself to not give up, even in the face of the great challenges he was facing. H.M.I shared: "Well, I told myself, I have to try" and he finished narrating that moment by recalling that he told himself "*de que se puede, se puede*" in other words, that it can be done, it can be done. He thus committed himself to finishing school because he realized he had the opportunity to do so with the support of the school. The school provided teachers who were responsive to his needs.

Kevin, another participant, also positioned his access to an education as the inspiration to leave his home country of Guatemala to seek better opportunities: "I believe that it is the type of opportunities that they give you here, other opportunities that I could not find in my country, like studying, that was my motivation, I wanted to continue going to school." His central goal was

continuing his studies to access a better life: “I did not have the economic resources, nor the support of the people who were supposed to help me.” He explained the limitations he confronted in his country and the advantages he found at his new school:

> The advantage here is that when I started school I saw that people really want to help you. Like help you, the help I found I had never found in my country, I found it here, it’s the people who from the beginning helped me, helped me to feel comfortable in this country, because I didn’t have or didn’t know how things worked here. In my country I thought one thing and once I arrived it was a different reality. And to find what I had been searching for, that for me was a relief, that is it. School was like, the support was more around mental health, for me mental health is the most important because if I am not well mentally, I am not well. That is what I found here, support for my mental health. I learned to overcome, to do things, for me that was a great advantage that I never found in my country.

Kevin analyzed the different elements that reaffirmed his commitment to his education starting with staff members who made him feel comfortable and who offered support in the form of counseling to help him adjust. As he received mental health support he realized that the school was providing what he had been searching for—a true opportunity to educate himself in a healing environment. Kevin’s metacognitive awareness about his dreams and how those mapped onto his new context led him to fully commit to finishing high school. The school prioritized mental health for students who needed that additional service. The process began with a thorough enrollment protocol that allowed the school to ascertain the specific needs of each student (Enrollment Protocol). This added element to the enrollment process was born out of work by what the school called The Newcomer Taskforce. A body composed of various staff members whose mission was to devise tailored supports to meet the needs of immigrant-origin students. Based on meeting notes, there was a concerted effort to add counseling services to immigrant-origin students who had often suffered various traumas during their migratory journey (Newcomer Taskforce notes, 2016-2019).

All the narratives offered insight into the high level of commitment students demonstrated to educating themselves and to taking advantage of the opportunities they were discovering in their new school—access to teachers with high content knowledge, an academic counselor who was supportive, resources, and a sense of being valued for wanting to pursue their education. But there was an added dimension to their pursuit of an education that was directly connected to family and the economic gains that may derive from an education. Through their own experiences as immigrant-origin students, these youth explicitly connected their education to multiple purposes, including access to better jobs that could ultimately benefit their entire families. Their expert knowledges indicated that if *educación* were to truly serve multiple purposes, then schools should endorse and support these goals as well.

Another element in the description of schooling for these youth, was a deep appreciation for the evolution of their own learning through their engagement with courses and interactions with teachers and peers. Hernan explained:

> I did not understand anything at the beginning, and now I reflect and say wow, I have grown, I understand many things in English and I become surprised, deciding to read an article or the news and I understand it, and when I first arrived I did not understand anything . . . the barrier as you called it, the barrier was the fear of not understanding and to not have the benefit of being bilingual, well, trilingual for me now. And I am so proud to know other languages.

Hernan could go back to the beginning of her process as a student in the USA and now appreciate what has transpired over time. She also boasted of being trilingual, even though in her statement she was explaining that she was fearful that she would never become bilingual, she pivoted to proudly express her knowledge of three distinct languages, English, Spanish, and K'iche' (Mayan language from Guatemala).

For Michelle there was acknowledgement and gratitude for the school's encouragement that she take five years, instead of the usual four years to graduate from high school. She shared: "Oh yes, it was long, the truth is that it was long, it was five, more than normal, but it was very good." Michelle painstakingly recalled her process as longer and different than other students' paths. She continued:

> Because just thinking about the time when I got there with zero English, I mean zero, but, I could tell you zero knowledge in mathematics, and other areas and courses; but after these five years I believe it was worth it because just to think that I now speak another language and if God allows, I will go to a university and with knowledge about what those courses will be like.

Michelle sounded confident about her process, albeit longer than the usual four-year path, she had found it fruitful because the five years allowed her the opportunity to solidify her content and language knowledge. The process was the key to her successful career in high school. The learning took time, but the time invested was worthwhile and will inform her approach to her college studies. Her high school did not shy away from extending students an additional year to complete their high school education. Although this "simple" extension may not seem consequential, schools in the state of California are ranked on the basis of graduation rates that only take into account students who graduate in four years and all requirements are set up within a four-year time frame (California Department of Education, CDE, 2021; California School Dashboard, 2019). Thus, for a school to allow students to graduate in five years as a means to support their educational dreams, is not just a statement about prioritizing students, but a political one against accountability systems that discourage such exceptions. For Michelle, that fifth year allowed her to complete several advanced courses, including an AP Capstone Research course. According to documents from the school, there was a process for immigrant-origin students to

receive specialized advisement about their educational goals and options that begins during the initial registration at the school and continues throughout their high school career (Student Enrollment Protocol, See Appendix C). In addition, the academic counselor must meet with every student to discuss progress towards graduation. During the various meetings with their counselor and teachers, students are advised about the different options they have and what those options represent. For a student like Michelle for whom school was so important, having a fifth year to enhance her preparation for college was ideal.

H.M.I. also addressed his awareness of the process of learning and how his school responded to his learning needs:

> Oh of course yes, during the first few months, the first classes we entered I did not understand anything. Then, as time went by and I went from class to another class, that's how I realized I was understanding what was said, and little by little, I was understanding more of what teachers were saying. Little by little, because well, in my case this did not happen from one day to the next, no, instead for me I believe it can take time, and indeed it is about your effort, your dedication and that is how little by little you begin to learn.

H.M.I. painted a picture of his process, the slow nature of learning, the evolution inherent to learning—a process that cannot be rushed or glossed over; the time must be invested. And directly, H.M.I. observed that the time must be invested by the student and by the school. Later in the interview he stated his recommendations for what schools should consider in their work with immigrant-origin youth:

> Of course I would say, not specifically for our school, but perhaps for other schools, I would tell them to understand them, because they come and have endured difficult moments, then understand and comprehend them. And this is not going to happen from one day to the next, and they will, little by little, get involved in school and get accustomed to it. I would keep saying to understand them more than anything, they come from fighting complex battles and they have gone through very difficult situations. Like the people who come from El Salvador, they go through all of Mexico. Then, it is very hard to cross through there, you know, crossing Mexico because there are so many

> obstacles, and many many barriers. Then, I would tell schools to understand them. I would hope they would open a space for them and speak with them and yes.

H.M.I. reiterated that the learning process—which for these students began with traversing through different countries, acquiring a second or third language, overcoming multiple obstacles along the way, getting accustomed to a new land, and a new schooling system—takes time. H.M.I. posited that if schools were to broaden their understanding of the conditions from which immigrant students originate, schools would be better equipped to craft richer and more personalized spaces for learning and adapting.

For Kevin, the learning process was conveyed from the perspective of his reserved, almost anti-social nature and the school's response to his specific needs:

> Oh at the beginning, at the beginning no, well personally I was not well, no, no, I did not have the motivation to start studying. But as time went on, and I see people how, how people who work at the school, the support they give, the help they look for. And for me, it was a process that was, a beautiful process because as I learned to get to know people, I learned to communicate more, learned how to be more social. And as that process happened, I started to adapt with time. The things I did not want to do, I would end up doing. Because I was more reserved, I did not want to participate in things, but I would observe people, how they motivated me. Like, do it, it doesn't matter if it's bad, it matters that you do it, it's not about you doing it right but that you try. Overcoming things, to overcome you have to do it. And for me that was the best, the process of how to be, how to grow.

Kevin's introspection revealed a deep understanding of his own learning style and the growth in his approach to learning through his observations and interaction with his environment. He did not want to study and was not motivated because he was not doing well emotionally; his mental health was gravely impacted by his immigration journey and his time in a detention center. But through his observation of what others were doing and saying to him, he was able to allow himself the opportunity to try and that changed everything. He was able to overcome (*superar, superación* were the words he used in Spanish) because he engaged in the process of learning

and growing. Kevin represented a more hesitant learner—reticent and withdrawn to an extent—his approach might have been dismissed as a lack of interest, and yet even in those quiet moments, Kevin was observing and learning from his environment before consciously deciding to participate. The school gave him ample space to work through his own learning process. His teachers embraced his contributions, however small, from the beginning. The school listened and provided counseling. School was a place to learn how to learn, to reconnect with one's dreams, and to connect with others. Kevin could observe this in the effort people made to reach out to him; ultimately, connection and support moved him to take part in his own education in a more active way. Centering students as a practice was not lost on these youth. Their expert knowledges revealed the interplay of their educational dreams and the pivotal school's role in maintaining those dreams by intentionally crafting spaces to learn, translanguage, connect, and heal. Learning was described as a multi-faceted process that required time and student-centered decisions on the part of the school.

II. Lived Experiences of *Educación* at the Intersection of Complicated Identities

One of the most compelling findings of the study was the dynamic and dense interplay between education and identity. These young men and women found themselves grappling with the impact of their ethnicity, immigration status, class, and gender in their new context—and it was indeed their position at the margins that forged complicated identities that evolved in various contexts including school. The evolution and self-awareness about the influence of one's identity in the project of schooling can better inform school policies. The following section offers the complicated identity categories evidenced through the interviews and research process that these youth described. Torre (2009) posited that individuals hold "multiple, overlapping, potentially

conflicting, identities, loyalties and allegiances" (p. 112). These complicated identities are more adequately captured by CRT and participatory methodologies because these methodologies offer epistemological implications that create knowledge and propel action towards social justice. The youth co-researchers and participants in this study contested traditional pathological or patronizing views of who they are as immigrants by demonstrating the complexity of their identity categories, and the ways in which they employ those identities with agency and autonomy in school and in other contexts. Their multiple, overlapping, potentially conflicting identities, loyalties, and allegiances constituted a rich description of the microcosm of immigrant-origin youth.

Within the school these unaccompanied youth were emerging bilinguals or trilinguals, engaged in deep learning and intellectual endeavors, pursuing their very personal dreams and goals, just like their fellow peers. Within the community, they were laborers and care-takers—cleaning houses, washing dishes in local restaurants, and caring for themselves and others. The youth co-researchers and the participants seamlessly moved across planes and languages, with a genuine facility and confidence in who they are and what their identities represent vis-à-vis the systems in which they participate. Their worldview was broad and cosmopolitan with a deep understanding of their own history, trajectories, and their new land (Bang, 2012). For example, Michelle cleaned houses, and enjoyed learning advanced mathematics and practicing her English writing. For this research project, she was the first one to complete the CITI certification and actually completed all courses, earning two more additional certificates that included content around medical clinical trials. She did all this as she cleaned houses three times a week and at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, became the sole breadwinner in her household. Kevin, who

graduated in 2018, spoke of an impactful field trip to a local community college, which set him on the path to work in the automotive industry as had been his dream since he was a child. He spoke eloquently of his journey through the school, the full-time shifts at local restaurants after school, and his latest job in a body shop, which he loves. He delivered on his desire to sponsor his younger brother to join him here in the United States. He now cares for his little brother, making sure he does not have to work like he did, and can instead focus on finishing school and accessing a college education. Kevin was also able to adjust his immigration status by feverishly seeking help and paying for various attorneys that cost him thousands of dollars.

This section expands on the different identities described by these young men and women. The four identity categories constructed through the research process included: laborer, caretaker, dreamer, and scholar. These four identity categories colored how these young immigrant-origin students experienced school and how they navigated roles within a system that was not built for students who hold so many responsibilities outside of school. In this section the focus is on the identity as laborers, caretakers, and dreamers. The scholar identity is explored in the last chapter, nested within the concept of educación.

Laborers

Five of the six youth worked outside the home in jobs that were often poorly compensated and offered little flexibility. However, for some, it was the only option they have had as they take care of their expenses, from rent to food, bills, and help for their families. They have no option but to work. Hernan explained:

> Ah yes, in fact we have had talks, mostly with my brothers and they have told me, what would I like to be and what have I thought. They have supported me and they are there to support me, perhaps not financially, but . . . but they have, I have their support. I believe that with their words they are the ones that give me more reason to continue, also because

> they tell me to be a good student, that there are opportunities and that one must know how to take advantage of them at the right time.

Hernan situated her brothers' support as the force that motivated her, particularly their words of encouragement. However, the support did not represent a financial advantage or economic assistance. The support came in the form of words of encouragement. Hernan worked outside the house and struggled with being undocumented as it limits her employment options and opportunities: "I think one of the disadvantages is not having papers, you can't do things early on, well in my opinion there are things that I would like to do but I can't because I don't have papers in this country." Hernan recognized the difficulties being undocumented represented, even when the person may have the best intentions to work hard and to study. There were limitations to the options available to young people like herself. She keenly understood that there was a system to be learned, even with the disadvantages she recognized, she felt that she could still leverage her educational opportunities. There was something to be gained from going to school, even if her status limited her options for employment and other opportunities. This points to the importance of schools engaging with youth around their individual struggles. Understanding the complexity of roles students play through their identities could inform school practices in a more authentic manner. The laborer identity clearly influenced how Hernan experienced and contextualized schooling.

H.M.I. shared a similar situation regarding family support that came in multiple forms, except economic assistance, his older sister opened her home to him when he arrived alone in the United States, but he had to cover all his expenses:

> Of course, I have 2 sisters who are here and in Mexico I have two other sisters . . . so what I saw also because students were arriving from Mexico, Central America, and I, what I noticed or tried to see is that they were arriving and they had parents waiting here.

> And they had their support as well. And I'm not saying that I didn't have support from my sisters, but that I had another way, because, since I had to pay rent, pay bills and all that. So I had to work, no? Because in order to survive, to pay bills or buy my things or like that, right? So what I saw, what I saw, was that other classmates who did have the support, or even those who were born here had their parents and they could give them everything. I do not say only in my case because there is another classmate too. I do not remember his name, he is the same, he had to work. So, I had to work and I didn't complain, no, because I knew and understood this, that I had to make a sacrifice to achieve, so you, I had to work. I would leave the house, I would leave the house around 7 in the morning and arrive at school at 8:00, 8:15 and leave at 3:30 to go to work, 4:30 to leave around 10:30, 11 and then go home and see if there was homework, and even the first week, it was very difficult for me, it was very difficult for me. When I got to the restaurant, I went to the bathroom and looked at myself. And I said to myself, because I looked at myself in the mirror, and I asked myself and I asked myself, can I do this for 4 years? And that's when I said, well, I have to make an effort and make myself want it; that it can be done, it can be done. And that's how that happened and yes.

H.M.I.'s introspection situated his struggle within those systems to which he belonged, family, school, workplace—and which he navigated to make schooling and full-time grueling work possible. He also emphasized not complaining but rather embracing the challenge by looking at himself and talking to himself, or rather talking himself to embrace the journey he had in many ways chosen, to achieve his dreams in this new land. He had to decide whether working after school every day from 4:30 pm to eleven at night was going to be feasible while going to school full-time. He understood that his homework time was not happening after school and under the guidance or support of an adult, but rather in between work and school, past midnight or whenever he could find chunks of time to sit down and study. This reality affected his ability to participate in other aspects of schooling he loved, like playing soccer. He recalled wanting to join the team and knowing that his work schedule would not allow him to do so. Everything in school he experienced through these identities.

Jose shared his work in a car wash as a responsibility that helped the family pay the bills; even though he centered his pursuit of education as the bigger responsibility, the reality of his position was that sometimes work had to take precedence:

> My only responsibility is to be a student, really, but also because I work, I have to help pay the bills, so although I have always wanted to have a slightly more decent job, eh to be able to help while I am studying, but I don't, I haven't achieved that, who knows maybe later.
>
> [*Interviewer: where have you worked?*] Well, before I used to work in a Korean restaurant, but I didn't like the treatment very much since the beginning, after a couple of weeks I fired myself so to speak, I never went back. And in one job that I did stay, was washing cars for a company, a rental car company.
>
> [*Interviewer: what days did you work? And school?*] Well, I don't know, the schedule sometimes came out and sometimes they were in need of workers and, let's say I didn't go to school that day. They would ask me to come in, but another reason is that I always worked, every Saturday and also on Sundays. I dedicated the fun days to go to work.
>
> [*Interviewer: All day?*] No, not all day because Saturdays it was only until noon, say from 8 to 12:00 sometimes at 1, and on Sundays from 8 to 3, it seemed until 3, sometimes later.

Jose presented his central identity and major responsibilities as a student, but then offered that he had to help pay bills and thus had to work, often in jobs he did not find fulfilling or helpful. He wanted more, but thus far had not achieved that. He went on to share that in his low-skill employment history, he had left a particularly abusive workplace because he did not think he had to put up with mistreatment. After his first paycheck, he walked out of that job at a local restaurant. He washed cars for a rental company, sometimes missing school because he was called in to replace an employee or to provide additional help on busy days. Once again, the data pointed to the juxtaposition of the students' commitment to their studies, and the reality of having to choose work over school. In addition, Jose poignantly added that while some other students might be resting or having fun on weekends, he was always working.

Attendance is one of the key accountability measures for schools. For immigrant-origin youth having to work instead of going to school is a reality. Although Jose did not always share the reason he was missing school, the school's counselor always followed up with students who were falling behind as documented in various databases and systems the school has set up. The monitoring that happened for students like Jose helped him to stay abreast of his schoolwork and to recognize that his attendance mattered to teachers and staff members.

Michelle expressed a similar tension between work and school, that is, her primary goal was to study and obtain an education because she loves school, but she also had to work to support the family:

> Well, ah well, I am working like twice a week, and more so now Ms., thanks to my salary well, my family is like, doing well; I am supporting them, mainly my income, my money because that is what we are using for, for our food. And also when my mother worked and I, well, yes, that has supported my family, because I was always the one who did things like making food, cleaning the house, because my parents worked every day and almost all day. and I have to do the house chores.
>
> [*Interviewer: And now with the pandemic?*] Uh my dad hasn't worked like for a month but, because it's been almost two months, my cousins have sometimes been able to get him one day a week or two days a week to work, but no.
>
> [*Interviewer: And your mom?*] No, she hasn't worked at all.
>
> [*Interviewer: But you have?*] Yes, Wednesdays and Saturdays.
>
> [*Interviewer: Where are you working?*] I am working cleaning houses, and sometimes my mom accompanies me and that is how it's been for two months.
>
> [*Interviewer: It is so hard right now, how did you end up cleaning houses?*] Uh, it was also through my mother, because she also works cleaning houses. And since I already have uh, let's say a work permit, and also uh, the age of 19, so that's why I'm working at least twice a week.

In this segment, Michelle also demonstrated the significance of her employment at a time when she became the sole breadwinner for the family, because both of her parents lost their jobs

due to the pandemic. She talked of cleaning houses for a living and how the work she did two days a week was the sustenance for the family. Neither her father nor her mother had been able to secure more stable employment once the pandemic affected their jobs.

Hernan worked outside the home at various cleaning agencies. But more importantly for her was the work she did taking care of her nieces for no pay. Her older brother offered his support but there was an understanding that she in return must be ready to pull her own weight in terms of rent and bills, while also providing additional help to the family for the opportunity to be in the United States:

> Taking care of my nieces, and I think it is also one of the reasons why I am not so involved in clubs or school sports because that makes me, that sometimes I cannot, because my brothers, they work, so sometimes no, there is no one with whom my nieces can stay. And so I will even offer myself, because I do not, because I would not like for them to, being able to do them a favor, I prefer a thousand times to take care of my nieces. And it is good that others take care of them, but it is how my brothers are going to earn their income, right? And then obviously they have to pay the one [person] who takes care of them, so I say, it's better I think that they save that money, and I can take care of them obviously.

Selflessly, Hernan assumed the babysitting responsibility to save her older brother the money he might have to pay a babysitter. In her understanding of schooling in the United States, she mentioned sports and clubs as something that was out of her reach because of her home and work obligations, even though she had heard how important those activities might be to pursue a college education. This awareness indicated that she knew the possible negative impact of not participating in extracurricular activities on college access. But she continued by emphasizing how significant familial support was:

> Ahah, yes, because I also tell them not to pay me anything because I'm doing it as a favor. And as I tell you, that is what it's like, the concept of our family: that we are in a family to be there for each other.

Hernan viewed her role as important within the context of familial obligations which included working outside the home and babysitting her nieces to save the family money. In addition, she shared that her education was important and that her family supported her determination to succeed: “They expect me to value the support they are offering me, to be able to study, and most of all, take advantage of, and to see the fruit, in the near future.” School was thus experienced as part of her desire to study, a goal supported by her older brother, but also as part of an entire ecosystem that included employment and family responsibilities that go beyond simple chores like cleaning one’s room.

For Kevin the situation was made more difficult because of his circumstances upon arrival, including the poor communication with his grandfather, with whom he came to live after years of being apart, and the difficulty in finding work and adapting:

> I have another language and to have had to learn Spanish correctly, English is a little more difficult. But as time went by, with the help they gave I adapted. But it is a disadvantage to come here without knowing anything. That is the harsh reality that one never thinks about when coming here. Like coming here without documents, knowing how to work, how you can work, and when you are a minor when you come here, you can't work. But the reality is that I came here, and that my parents are there. And how to survive: the rent, your income, food, that was the reality that I never thought of, that I would have to go through when I came here. And being alone and when I came here I only had my grandfather; and finding help, how to go out to do things is a disadvantage for me, it was a disadvantage. Because I did not have a friend, a partner like a brother, a relative who knows, to see how things are or to be told to teach you how, how to survive; and that is what was a disadvantage for me because without knowing what life is like here; but the good thing was that I was able to adapt, little by little.
>
> [*Interviewer: And you had not seen your grandfather in a long time.*] Yes, he came in 2002 and I was very young when he came here and no, I did not know him. So I came without ever having lived with my grandfather, without knowing him. I only knew him in photos, but there was no, we did not have very good communication. That is the other reality that happens here, with him, how to adapt with him, talk to him, how to ask him for advice, if not, well I did not know him well, it was like when a stranger enters, he enters your life, you do not know how he might react, how he thinks that is how it was for me, it was a process, the how to adjust to him.

For Kevin it was not just a matter of understanding his family obligations in terms of paying bills or helping with the rent. His grandfather barely communicated with him and yet there was an expectation that even as a minor, he would have to find work, pay rent, cover his bills and food without any guidance as to how to do that. At the time, his grandfather offered no assistance in figuring out this new land. Thus, Kevin found himself totally alone, at sixteen, without any understanding of the new system, nor anyone to assuage his fears or answer his questions. He spent long hours working in local restaurants, literally running to work right after school. Once Kevin's younger brother came over to join him, Kevin had a different plan for him:

> Yes, now my brother has come now, and I want to teach my brother what I would have wanted to learn from the beginning. But to teach him how things are here, teach him how to face things, give him advice, which they never gave me and I want him to adapt faster than me, I want him to be better. Now my brother is a great help for me, it is a great help to have a person with whom you lived, you can talk to him, he knows how you are, it is a relief.

The hard lessons learned about finding work and figuring out a new life in Los Angeles, is what Kevin has transmitted to his brother, to ensure he does not feel alone and without real support to figure things out. He has crafted a different environment for his little brother to adapt and thrive based on his own reflection about what can make a difference.

A challenge that was mentioned explicitly by Hernan and Kevin was the issue of being undocumented and how much that curtails one's chances to find employment in the first place or to take advantage of programs that are only available to permanent residents or citizens. Often the public hears a narrative about what undocumented immigrants may be extracting from the system or how they may deplete resources from others, the truth is being undocumented means you qualify for no assistance, perhaps very limited access to medical services if you happen to be

under immigration proceedings like refugee status until the age of twenty, but little else (McCorkle & Bailey, 2016). These youth in our public high schools are making ends meet to survive in a very hostile environment—and yet they fill essential roles in our local restaurants and service industry in general, a reality that may be hard for us "walking freely in society" to admit and absorb (Patel, 2018, p. 528). The youth all painted a picture of their identities as laborers in low-skill jobs that allowed them to make rent and pay bills, contribute to their families, and assist them in forging ahead with dreams of a formal education that might one day help them find something better. All presented a portrait of strength, social agility, and resistance. They saw their sources of income as extremely important for themselves and their families, and even though they recognized the jobs were low-skilled, they felt proud of what they were able to construct for themselves and others.

Caretakers

The role of caretakers for these youth emerged as a broader category that included not just working to pay bills but familial connection and collectivism as a way to thrive in this country. Families were the central networks of support however tenuous the relationships may be at times. In addition, for some of the youth their Christian faith deeply influenced how they viewed the concept of taking care of others, especially family. Alex defined his role as care-taker based on the home chores for which he is responsible: "For now because my mom works, I just do, I make my own food, clean the whole apartment just that, and I accompany her when we go buy food, when we go to wash clothes, that is all." But he added a recognition that he will always need to think of taking care of his mother in the future:

Ah, the future to be with my mother and to have the two jobs like I mentioned I want to

> have, be an art teacher and be a tattoo artist; and then have my house, maybe have my partner, and have my mother close by and my two older brothers, to always be in communication.

For Alex it was important to communicate the understanding of caring for one another that is present in his family. For now, he does not have to work outside the home, but he has responsibilities in the home. In the future, he wanted to make sure he was close to his family, especially his mother who has supported him greatly.

Hernan lost her mother years ago and has come to live with one of her brothers. She had not seen her brothers or father for over ten years. There was an expectation that Hernan work outside the home to take care of her own expenses, help the family, and provide free babysitting for her nieces. During virtual learning, it has been hard for Hernan to keep up with her own work and support her nieces as well. She explained that it was their shared Christian faith that kept the family together and also informed the duty they have to help one another, even if that help is not always financial:

> In fact, my communication with them [brothers and father] is very good, we get along very well and, above all, well, I would also like to add, that since we participate in the church, I believe that this is what, my family, we are a united family, trying to give our best and always do what is right.

Clearly Hernan knew that there was an expectation that the family was helping her go to school so she can in the future share what she accomplishes with the family. She had to take care of herself and her family, but the understanding remained that there was a mutual benefit. For example, Hernan viewed taking care of her nieces as both limiting her involvement at school, while simultaneously strengthening the close bonds to her family which was supporting her educational journey.

Jose shared taking care of responsibilities in the home, working part-time to help pay the bills, and making sure he was taking care of his own needs because his paternal grandmother was in need of help herself. He shared first that being here without his mom has really impacted him, as it is not the same to be with his father and grandmother: “Yes, then, I think that is what has affected me a bit being here, but if we talk about work, I think that life has improved a lot because I have learned to be more independent.” Jose appreciated that having to take care of himself and assume more responsibility has had a positive impact as he has learned to become by more self-sufficient. He added: “My grandmother is too old, I don't know, I feel that I no longer like to depend on what she does, instead I also like to do things on my own.” Once again we see how these young immigrant students experienced school and life by embracing all the aspects of their lives, accepting the responsibilities and focusing on the positive outcomes of those circumstances.

Michelle expressed a sense of duty to her parents, especially because she is the youngest female and the one child with the opportunity to attend school in the United States. Her parents helped her two sisters back in Guatemala and thus she was cognizant of the familial expectations regarding her education as well as her financial contributions to the family. Her education was one way her family expected she would take care of them in the future: “They are waiting for me, that I graduate with a degree, have a job, and mainly help them.” But once again Michelle sees this as part of the shared values the family holds, and it was important for her to take care of her responsibilities as a student and as a contributor to the family finances. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic both her parents lost their jobs; Michelle was the only one earning any money and her income brought food to the table. “I am supporting them, mainly with money,

because that is what we are using for, for our food." Michelle's income helped the family survive the first two months of the pandemic. She was astonished at how much the family was able to do with her small earnings. Pursuing an education was an integral part of these students' identities, equally important was helping take care of their families and meet certain expectations and obligations.

Dreamers

As the identity categories were coded the youth co-researchers expressed a desire to include a category that was capacious for the size of their dreams and identities as immigrant-origin youth in the United States, and thus part of a broader, larger community. They selected the word Dreamer to encapsulate the dreams that drove them to come to a new country. They also saw in this term a bond with other youth, especially DREAMers and activists like the DACA youth behind the movement and website www.unitedwedream.org. However, they also contested that dominant narrative of deservingness, advocating for a humane treatment for all immigrants, and for all immigrants to be seen as human beings with inalienable rights that should be honored and respected. Kevin expressed this sentiment and emphasized the importance of sharing the immigrant story to shed light on a reality that many ignore and simply do not understand:

> Yes, it would be a good idea for all immigrants to express their experiences, so we would realize, how it is, how things are, how one experiences what happens. So the voice would be louder, to give, to tell their stories so other people, it would give them the courage to express themselves and share that they have lived through the same experiences. This way, people who do not know anything or have not lived those experiences would understand how one feels, what one goes through, one's situation.

Kevin's argument was that having a better understanding of the situations immigrants encounter can deepen the understanding of their plight.

Through a Padlet the youth co-researchers wrote the following statements to define that complicated category of being dreamers: “It’s about our big dreams and goals,” and having “a consistent positive attitude with a focus on work.” They added that it was important to see themselves in “future careers as professionals”. “We want to be somebody, want to obtain a stable income, have stable sources of income.” The group also wrote that their dreams are very much in reference to their own family’s dreams and aspirations: “Use my family as a point of reference and ask, what have they accomplished? How can I stand out?” The youth also shared on the Padlet a desire to have their efforts recognized, they wrote: “Wanting to be recognized and *sobresalir* (be outstanding), because I am inspired by others and I want to inspire others.” The Padlet was replete with these phrases, signaling a recognition of the students’ own efforts to meet varying expectations about what their journey to the United States represented for themselves and their families.

H.M.I. echoed the sentiments in these phrases by sharing his message to and for other immigrant-origin youth like himself:

> Oh my message would be that giving up is not an option, maybe in my case, I may not be the best example; there are other students who have shown that it is possible, no? So if you feel like you don't have enough support or things, so look at my story, I had to get here when I was 15 years old, I had to work, I had to pay rent, and still had more obligations in Mexico. What, maybe look at my story, that maybe they will be motivated to move forward, that it is difficult, of course it is difficult, but nothing is impossible. Then dream, you have to keep dreaming and working very hard. Studying very hard to achieve, and if that's what I told you, don't give up, and we're all DACA too. I am very inspired and I feel identified as an immigrant and I feel identified as DACA, we are all DACA and DACA is this [points to himself]. Yes, of course, and I feel identified with them because, because they are students who come from other countries who, just as I have struggled, have tried a lot, then I feel identified with them. So we are all DACA and DACA never surrenders, and we are with them.

Here H.M.I. explained that his story of struggle connected to other stories of struggle, especially other young immigrants like DACA recipients, and he felt identified with their efforts and their collective power to keep on fighting for their rights and the rights of others. He faithfully held on to the thought that it is essential to keep dreaming and envisioning a better future, while you work in solidarity with others to create that better space for all. Interestingly, he started out by saying his story may not be ideal for others to learn, but upon further reflection, H.M.I. pivoted to present his own journey as an example of what is possible. Once again there is so much potential for schools to leverage these powerful identities to expand learning opportunities for all students. Immigrant-origin youth are experiencing schools through their daily realities as immigrants in this country.

For Michelle the dream to continue studying became true through the less conventional five-year path to finish high school, but she saw the benefit in the extra year to help her achieve her dreams:

> Uh, well, thank God, [Ms. X.] spoke to me and I didn't graduate this year because otherwise I would have been a disaster. But I hope to graduate next year, although I was here for 5 years but it was very good because that way I learned a lot and well I hope to graduate with, so with, I would say with honors, but maybe yes.
>
> [*Interviewer: Yes with honors*]. And graduate college, right, school with my proud teachers and my family too. Yes, I would like to go Ms. but sometimes I think it will be impossible, but sometimes I also think it will be possible. But I do want to go to a university and I want to continue studying.

Michelle lived at the intersection of what is and what may be possible—her dream to achieve a college education. She wants to make her teachers and her family proud. Michelle presented what it has been like to dream and get close to that dream just to encounter new barriers, but then making a conscious decision to forge on and keep working hard. The connection to her family

was also very important. And this connection to her family and broader community were expressed later through her desire to be in a field that assists the community:

> Well, that one day it will be my turn to do the same as [Ms. X.] is doing; one day I would also like to help the community. Although I have always liked it, but I think that something I have had, is that I have, I have not had the time but yes, I would also like to do the same, as [X.] is doing, help, and also get ahead.

Michelle saw possibility in pursuing one's educational dreams while simultaneously aiding one's community. She presented this idea of uplifting others through one's dreams and seeing examples of that in her own school.

For Kevin, who graduated in 2018, there was a deep sense of accomplishment regarding his dreams and identity as a community member who has a stable job now in the auto industry and who can care for his younger brother:

> I see a future for me, a future that I always wanted to have, like the future that I always wanted to see for myself, as a person, to have stability, to have what is necessary. Having the opportunity, like having the opportunity to get things done. My future for me, I see my future as, well, for me the future, my future will be like what I always wanted to have, the goals I always had since I was little, like and that's what I see, the future I see.

He pursued certain goals and was able to accomplish those goals with a lot of work and support from his school. Kevin saw the future looking bright for him, with stability and with what is necessary. It is important to note that earlier in the interview Kevin described how proud he was to have been able to sponsor his brother to come to the United States and how hard he had worked for that dream to come true. Thus, the dreams these young people shared were always connected with their families and broader community. There was always someone depending on their success and that fueled their desire to thrive. The connection and interdependence with family was never expressed as a burden or as a weight on these students' trajectory—family was

instead the source of inspiration, motivation, courage, and purpose. The focus was on the power of the collective, and one's achievements reflect on the entire family, not just the individual.

In this vein of familial connectivity and responsibility, Hernan posited immigrant dreams as setting up the conditions for the next generation:

> Well, the truth is, that I say that because, I think I try not to take that into account [*anti-immigrant rhetoric*] those words in my personal life. No, so no, because of what that reality could say because I know that it is true, I know that there are many, many people like me immigrants of whom, perhaps a large percentage in which, oh no, not as does [inaudible] maybe they don't have or haven't had a great education, oh they haven't obtained that American dream, what that means, right? But I don't know, for myself, but it is also because they obviously have come for their children, if they have not had it, but they want to give their children the best. I don't know if I am explaining myself. [*interviewer: Yes.*] One works for the next generation, for our children.

Hernan offered the capaciousness of her dreams and those like her, who come inspired to get an education, to achieve their goals as young people full of ideas and possibility—that possibility also involved their families and even future generations.

The fluidity with which these young people moved across all their identities spoke to the multi-faceted nature of their very existence but also to their location within nested social systems. They have learned how to pursue their educational dreams by investing in their identity as scholars; they have left jobs where they were treated poorly in search of better opportunities as laborers in low-skill employment in car washes or restaurants; they take care of themselves and others in order to continue in their journey to achieve their dreams. These young scholars made "connections across seemingly different theoretical positions" (Torre, 2009) and enriched their school contexts with their lived experiences and world views. What if schools were to harness that type of orientation and apply it to how learning and schooling is experienced? What if schools invested in learning about students' out-of-school experiences? What if schools prepared

room for a student's whole-self and ensured that the school mirrored the student? Schools could then see their role embedded in and inextricably connected to the community for generations to come. Schools would thus contextualize their responses in a much more student-centered and liberatory way.

III. Interpretations of a Humanizing *Educación*

The unaccompanied youth in this study made meaning of the humanizing potential of education, of an authentic e*ducación* by weaving their identities onto their schooling experiences and reflecting on how their school context opened spaces for them to grow as scholars and as community members**.** Their narratives have been situated within spaces the school curated to provide students with access points to their educational aspirations. The concept of spaces is informed by feminist thinkers like Patricia Hill Collins (1998) who spoke of spaces Black women occupy through their "outsider/within" status to navigate their contexts. Sandoval (2000) and Spivak (1988) referenced a "strategic essentialism" that is deployed in third spaces, where various aspects of one's identity are leveraged to interrogate power when one is in a marginalized, minoritized, sub-altern status. Anzaldúa (2000) referred to this as being in the "borderlands" or existing as *nos-otras* for Latinx and other colonized peoples. In other words, for Latinx individuals there are often conflicting identities within us—that of colonizers because we are also part of the project of coloniality and being other-ed (*otras*) within the same context because of our minority status in the United States. Due to the fluidity and multidimensional nature of minoritized populations, third spaces allow for those conflicting and more nuanced identities to exist and thrive. The site where the study was conducted was able to create these

third open spaces for these immigrant-origin youth through humanizing practices around translanguaging, connection, and healing.

Curated Spaces for Translanguaging

One of the unexpected findings of the study was the tremendous degree to which language overshadowed other aspects of the schooling experience for unaccompanied youth. Students shared the importance of bilingual teachers, staff, and classmates to facilitate their adjustment to the school. But their representations of their classrooms went beyond bilingualism and reflected an openness that affirmed students' identities. The youth were in fact describing translanguaging spaces where they were allowed to do language (Garcia & Kleyn, 2016). Translanguaging as a linguistic and social theory offers a stance, a design, and an opportunity for transformational shifts in how we understand and enact bilingual education and bilingual classrooms (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Garcia & Kleyn, 2016). In translanguaging the focus is on the dynamism with which bilinguals, including emerging bilinguals, utilize their entire linguistic repertoire to communicate effectively and efficiently (Garcia, 2020; Garcia & Kleyn, 2016; Garcia et al., 2017; Garcia & Wei, 2014). There is ample evidence that teachers at this school created *translanguaging spaces* (Garcia & Kleyn, 2016) to "ensure that students 'do' language using their full repertoire" (p. 28). The students' descriptions of language learning in the classroom represented tangible examples of translanguaging thirdspaces that go beyond bilingual education (Garcia & Wei, 2014). The school's professional development and approach focus on translanguaging to guide teachers' pedagogy and instructional planning (See Appendix B).

The translanguaging spaces in the classrooms facilitated the development of students' bilingual identity and their confidence in being able to actively contribute to their own learning

and to the learning of others. The process was always dialogical. For example, Jose shared: “If it hadn’t been for the bilingual teachers, I would have been a pitiful student because it was a process of learning English and being able to pass classes at the same time” and he continued, “Yes that also helped, there were difficult moments where I really did not know how to defend myself in English, so I had to turn to my one tool available, Spanish.” Student Michelle expanded on this idea: “I have always needed others to support me and tell me this is what you do or don’t do this. At the time my doubts or questions . . . my English was not enough, I did not speak in English like that yet, so it helped to have classes in Spanish and in English.” Alex echoed these experiences by sharing: “Teachers would use their little Spanish to explain things to me, they would take ten minutes explaining, I remember the geography class, I was with [Ms. X.] and she tried so hard and if she did not have the word, she would turn to bilingual classmates who would correct her and that way she could help me.” Students demonstrated a deep self-awareness of the process that was taking place around them and the role these open linguistic classrooms played in their learning.

Student Hernan emphasized her observations and recognition of the added complexity for teachers who teach using multiple languages:

> Teachers have always been helpful, bilingual teachers have helped me greatly, more than teachers who only speak English, but they too, I can see the effort they make in their classes; perhaps they cannot teach the class in both languages but on the supplies list or the hand-outs they always try, since I got to the school, I would see them figuring out a way to use both languages and that is a great support for us students.

Hernan described what she noticed among her teachers, whether bilingual or emerging bilinguals; teachers made an effort to reach her and to help her understand the new language. In

many ways the teachers were modeling for Hernan what it means to function in multiple languages and the resources she could access to make meaning of her new learning environment.

Perhaps most poignantly, alumni participant H.M.I. summarized the sentiment in this way:

> They [teachers] would speak Spanish too and of course, for me, it was a privilege. There are also teachers who only speak English, and even so they tried to help. And the bilingual teachers like [Ms. X.], I loved that class, history class, the same with the teacher who teaches the world history class, [Ms. Y.]. [Ms. Y.], yes and among other bilingual teachers, I used to see their professionalism and the passion with which they would teach us—because they wouldn't only do it in English, they would do it in Spanish. Then, I believe that it is not easy to do, to teach in two languages, no but I always saw it as a privilege, because it was excellent to listen to Spanish and English, for me I see it as a privilege.

H.M.I.'s words highlighted the power and the influence that bilingual adults can have on emerging bilinguals who are grappling with academic English and Spanish, depending on their level of education. Simultaneously, there was an understanding that teaching or learning in two languages was a privilege because it expands one's experiences. H.M.I. situated access to bilingual teachers as a privilege that he appreciated because of the impact it had on his language acquisition process. He was conscious that teaching in a bilingual manner could not be easy and thus embraced his teachers' effort to teach him as a source of pride and motivation. H.M.I. expressed so much excitement about listening to English and Spanish from the beginning and positioned this practice as a powerful way to acquire the language. In fact, being exposed to bilingualism from the beginning made him realize the potential he had to do the same.

Bilingual adults may be a first step in providing access for students like H.M.I, but opening up linguistic spaces to become translanguaging spaces is much more transformational. These open linguistic spaces allowed for emerging bilinguals and all students to seamlessly

deploy their rich linguistic repertoires. Therein lies the power of such third spaces, where students leverage "the agency to negotiate their linguistic and meaning-making repertoires. That is, the locus of control of the language rests with the students, as they move to expand their home language practices to include those in English for academic use" (Garcia & Wei, 2014, p. 75). The school has intentionally crafted translanguaging spaces that allowed students to flourish and there was evidence of the progress the school has made towards that goal. According to H.M.I. he saw the development and expansion of translanguaging as more courses were taught bilingually-multilingually in consequent years at his school. He had failed a history class in his first year and decided to retake the course; this second time the course was offered in a translanguaging manner and here is what he experienced:

> So, I took the class the following year and with more classmates who spoke Spanish and the class was more in Spanish and also in English and I was determined. I took notes, I did my homework, I would stay after sometimes whenever I could, after school. Also my bilingual classmates, we had group projects and they would explain some things for me and I understood others, and so and so, that is how that situation was. But I received so much support from bilingual classmates, they are the same, as I say what a privilege to have them by my side because they helped me so much.

He clearly benefited from the linguistic openness of the course. He also valued the contributions of his bilingual peers to his learning process as well as the translanguaging space where all languages were embraced, deployed, and appreciated. Just like Jose called it a "learning exchange," H.M.I. also described a linguistic transaction that enriched and augmented his language development.

Michelle appreciated the translanguaging that took place in her courses because it facilitated her access to content and to learning English:

> The process has worked well because if my teachers had spoken English, one hundred

> percent English, I believe I would not have learned as I have learned. . . . I believe that if I had had doubts [questions], I would have just kept those doubts to myself, but because they spoke to me in Spanish, I was then able to share all my doubts. Then I do believe that it helped very much to have both Spanish and English from the beginning.

Seeing bilingualism in action gave Michelle access to school; she felt free to ask questions which assuaged her doubts about whether it was possible to learn the new language and feel fully integrated into the school community. She added: "You do feel pressure to learn, yes I would say pressure because people talk to you in English and you are lost, what did they say? . . . I have to learn, I want to know at least how to respond." Michelle recognized the social aspect of her new language to help her participate fully in the classroom.

For Hernan seeing bilingual instructions and working with bilingual peers made a significant difference in her language acquisition process:

> I have learned a lot, as soon as I see the assignment and whatever is there in Spanish and in English, that helps me to understand better and do better with understanding the reading or the instructions telling me what I have to do, that helps me a lot, I learn new vocabulary and understand better. And my classmates, it doesn't matter if it sounds bad or you are not saying it correctly, they would correct me in a really nice way and that helped me very much; conversations with teachers too because the teachers respect us, whereas students sometimes may laugh.

Hernan was well-aware that she had various resources available—bilingual text that facilitated her comprehension of the content and bilingual peers who offered support.

Alex's approach to his language acquisition demonstrated his growth as an emergent bilingual starting with his first day in school:

> I remember that day, I did not want to go, it was the first day, everything might be in English, and that I would feel super uncomfortable, arrive at a new place, I was not going to know anyone, no one was going to talk to me, I thought that I was going to be alone always, but as days went by I started realizing that it was different than what I had thought that first day, little by little I started to like going to school every day . . . and yes some teachers, they spoke, they were bilingual; but there were others who were not and

> when I arrived their English, no their Spanish was not very good but they would try to help me so I could understand what others were saying.

In this description Alex revealed his awareness of the new language he was acquiring as well as the conditions that led him to feel comfortable in spaces where both languages were used—from teachers' bilingualism to the personalized explanations he received. Notice that he was always focused on the interaction of both languages and his approach to listening intently to determine when he needed assistance. Alex then described the specific factors that helped him learn—materials, teachers, and support staff:

> The first process that has helped me is to learn words, almost daily in our ELD class, which we had every day, every day, first thing in the morning. We learned words, we would repeat the same word until we memorized it; also reading, we would attempt to read and when we didn't understand, counselor X would be going around us and she would explain what each word or sentence meant, the meaning of each word. Sometimes even during nutrition or lunch she would say hi to us and ask if we needed help. And yes I would, for reading to figure out, well because I did not know a lot, and when I had time I used to attempt to put sentences together and I would ask how to say a Spanish word and she would tell me in English, and how the verb goes first or where the adjective goes.

The active participation in his own language learning is a testament to Alex's emerging bilingualism. His contrastive analysis to learn things like the placement of verbs or adjectives precisely describe what translanguaging recognizes about dynamic bilinguals: bilinguals constantly deploy their entire linguistic repertoires to access language, the language of school, the language of learning (Garcia, 2020). At his school, this practice was observed across classrooms as teachers allowed for linguistic repertoires to be deployed, including the option to use multiple languages to complete an assignment or project based on the purpose and audience.

Hernan was keenly aware that her trilingualism is aided by her experience with languages. Hernan learned K'iche' as a first language. K'iche' is a Mayan language spoken by about two million people in the highlands of Guatemala. Spanish was Hernan's second language.

When she arrived in the United States, she began her journey to acquire a third language. Hernan's descriptions spoke to her dynamic use of the assets at her disposal:

> At the beginning, when I first got here I would see how they tried to use both languages. And that is a great support for us. I have learned so much because at the moment I see, I see an assignment, I look at the Spanish, I look at the English and I understand better. I understand what I am supposed to do with the reading or the instructions to complete a task, and that helps me a lot, I learn new vocabulary and I understand better.

Here, Hernan described her dialogical use of English and Spanish. One language informs the other, and together both languages contribute to her deepened comprehension of the material. Spanish is a second language, which puts her at an advantage as a language learner. She has practice acquiring and utilizing languages. Her linguistic repertoires are rich. In her current academic context in the United States, she read both languages, then compared them to make meaning and to accomplish tasks and master content. Hernan described her processing of the two languages simultaneously to make meaning, and to apply what she was learning to complete assignments. Furthermore, she explained how her use of the two languages augmented her overall vocabulary and understanding of English. She did not say or imply that the Spanish instructions curtailed the need to look at the English explanation, but rather that the Spanish was the platform to launch into the English language to enrich her understanding. Cognitively and practically, Hernan was using her linguistic repertoires to access and advance her learning. She was also exposed to bilingualism on the part of the teachers, the teachers with more proficiency, taught in both languages; teachers with less proficiency attempted other ways to use their two languages. She witnessed various expressions of bilingualism among the adults and she was aware of what that represented for herself as a learner. The school's professional development records demonstrated a commitment to learning and applying translanguaging practices in all

content areas. According to the school's proposals for their dual-language program, the goal was to be certified as a dual-language program school from transitional kindergarten to twelfth grade. At the time of the study, the school was certified as a dual-language school for grades TK through seven. However, the descriptions of the students revealed that translanguaging spaces existed throughout the school, including at the high school level.

Hernan also touched upon the socio-emotional aspect of acquiring another language and the importance of having a support network spearheaded by teachers. She continued:

> What has helped me always has been the charisma of the teachers and the trust above everything else. I feel their support, being surrounded by people who motivate you, motivate you to seek and accomplish your objective. Then it is more, so important, because if there were not any people like that around me, especially my teachers, I believe that my self-esteem would have suffered and I would say that it would have been so difficult for me to learn English, so I know that helps a lot.

Like other youth, she was aware of the role the teachers' encouragement had on her own linguistic and scholarly development. The teachers' motivating words and active language approaches made Hernan feel that she could learn English and participate in class. She shared the same sentiment about peers: "Yes, there are also classmates who also, classmates who have helped me. Then in that way I have been able to learn, and especially when they encourage me, so they help me and encourage me to speak especially."

Jose also shared how pairing the two languages not only built a sense of unity among immigrant-origin students but also allowed for richer language learning opportunities:

> It would not be good to only have English in class, instead of Spanish, even though we know it is important. The truth is that what brought us together, what built unity among us was the fact that we all spoke one language, our mother tongue, and I feel that helped a lot. I feel that was the great connector in those classes. And I think that we learned because there are so many verbs that are so similar, that you use in Spanish and also work the same way in English, or they sound, they sound very similar. I think it could be balanced, I mean you can't exaggerate and only use Spanish because that would mean we

> are wasting our time and not learning [English]. And also, also because there were moments so difficult where I really did not know how to defend myself in English any more, and I had to resort to my one and only weapon, my Spanish.

Jose effectively presented how his own contrastive analysis of the two languages contributed to his learning. He was constantly analyzing how Spanish works and mapped that knowledge onto English. He found which verbs and forms worked well in both languages. Furthermore, Jose detailed a whole affective aspect of his language acquisition process—the fact that students could deploy their linguistic arsenals in their classes, opened up how well they felt in a class and thus how effectively they could learn the content. Jose situated his learning within a nested system that began with his own dynamic use of language, followed by bilingual teachers, and bounded by a network of peers who helped advance his learning. Jose explicitly identified one of translanguaging's main principles, the ever-present linguistic awareness in the part of the student and the student's deployment of their entire linguistic repertoire to make meaning and to communicate. Leveraging that dynamism in classrooms with bilingual populations can enhance language use for all students.

These young men and women exhibited a high degree of awareness about their language acquisition and the elements that assisted in their learning. Michelle offered a similar awareness in learning her new language that shifted from basic words to tell time, to understanding complex concepts required to complete her CITI certification to conduct research. She began her description with the role of her teachers:

> No, I believe it was [Ms. X.], yes, it was [Ms. X.] and also [Ms. Y.], but I know she did not have as hard a time teaching the class in Spanish because she can speak Spanish; but [Ms. X.], she speaks English, but even so she made an effort to speak to us in Spanish; to give her class in Spanish and that was such a great support. And also [Ms. Z.] who during biology class which was much harder, because it was science, but still, she would help us

> with the homework, she would translate things to Spanish and sometimes we did not understand, that was so helpful, when they explain things in Spanish.

Michelle depicted three different classrooms in which the teacher's bilingualism allowed her to better understand and access the content. She was also aware of teachers' proficiency in Spanish and then evaluated how difficult it might be for a teacher to teach bilingually. She appreciated the teachers' linguistic challenges because she was confronting those same challenges in her effort to learn a new language. Michelle knew that having access to both languages allowed her to ask questions in Spanish while simultaneously learning English. For Michelle, an additional source of inspiration to learn and try to use English was the pressure she felt when she did not understand what someone was saying:

> So then you begin to think, what if what they said was important and how are you going to know, then it was in those moments, or moments like going to the store and having to speak English because the cashiers did not speak English or in a restaurant, I think in those moments you tell yourself, okay, I have to learn so I can at least respond.

Michelle saw the importance of learning English to be able to interact with others, even if it was at the simplest level. She centered the communication with others as a propelling force to learn the language, but not just for what she wanted to express, but to understand what others were saying to her. She intuitively valued communication with peers and sought to honor that exchange with a response.

Michelle found that the best place to engage in basic language skills was in her ELD class, where students had the space "to have small conversations between us, because I realize it's not the same to speak with a person, who is like you learning than speaking with a person who is more advanced or who cannot speak Spanish." Michelle adroitly described the ways in which language is learned in various contexts, including the skills one practices in an ELD

classroom. The ELD classroom was open for "small conversations" set up with a manageable set of language forms and functions. Michelle contextualized learning by describing what she needed in each context and how those skills grew to guide her language development. She also exhibited a high degree of autonomy and agency to interact with those spaces in ways that aided her language development.

H.M.I. also reiterated how integral the ELD class was to his language acquisition process because of its design:

> Oh, of course when I had class with [Ms. X.], it was the books she gave us and sometimes I had questions about the pronunciation and that used to help me, asking questions and what I learned, I mean you never stop learning, always, every day you learn, you learn I don't know, from letters to vocabulary, but what really helped was also, it helped me so much that computer program [*interviewer: Rosetta Stone*.], yes Rosetta Stone. That helped me so much and to practice it with my classmates right, I would ask them if I could practice my English with them and they would reply, of course, and that helps you a lot because you get a lot of practice. And yes the first classes I did not understand anything. Then time goes by, and as time goes by you take one class then another and I would realize, oh I understood what was said, and little by little I began to understand what teachers were saying.

H.M.I. was deeply aware of his process and the different resources he used to learn—books, a computer-based program, peers, and teachers. He described how he used each of those resources to expand his knowledge and truly appreciated the daily cycle of new learning. H.M.I. finished this section of the interview by saying "yes, little by little, because well, in my case this did not happen from one day to the next, instead for me it took time, and it is about making an effort, your dedication, and little by little you learn." He poignantly called attention to the process involved in learning a new language and indirectly called for school systems to account for that process, however long it might take for each student.

For Kevin, access to bilingual teachers in different courses was integral to his language acquisition:

> Oof, they are of such great help. When you first arrive, when you are recently arrived, you don't know anything about languages, you don't know how things are. People who speak your language I believe is a great help because with that, teachers who are bilingual for me personally, helped me so much, especially because I did not know the language [Spanish]. And to have that support to hear people say it doesn't matter, it's okay. To have people that speak your language, I think that was such a big help, for which I am grateful to have teachers like that. And it's not only about receiving the assistance you may need, when you are new to the country, when you know nothing, but to have them teach you bilingually is the best help that can be given to you. [Interview: tell me more about the process]. What helped me most was my ELD class, it is a class where you have the support of the teachers, like starting from zero or learning and speaking the language from zero, what things are called, and the support you receive. For me that class helped me a lot to advance, because I had bilingual teachers. And to have that class, the class challenges you, little by little you are learning, and in that class I learned so much. To have the support of the teachers, I mean to have teachers whose role is specifically to help you learn English and I really like that. It was the class I never wanted to miss because I always learned more.

Kevin explained how helpful it was to be in a space where having "zero" English was acceptable for all, because the class was designed to take you through the process of learning the language. This idea of starting from zero or from a limited level of knowledge also permeated his description of how he mastered Spanish in the United States. That is, he lived through parallel processes, mastering and finessing his Spanish while he learned English. For his dual language challenge, having access to bilingual teachers was impactful. Learning Spanish as a second language became a bridge to learning English and to adapting to his new land:

> A disadvantage is finding like, the reality of things I encountered here. How things are for immigrants, to be undocumented, to have nothing, change nothing, to not know the language, it's another language and for me, it made adapting really hard. But with time and with the support I had, that helped me learn other languages. To have, to come here without speaking Spanish very well, was a great obstacle, because I have a first language. To begin with, I had to learn Spanish correctly and then English was harder. But in time and with the help I received, I was able to adapt . . . [Ms. X.], she was my motivation to learn to speak [Spanish] correctly.

Kevin first situated his challenges within a broader context that included being undocumented and not being a native speaker of Spanish. The language difficulties made Kevin's adaptation a lot more complex. Kevin's first language is Mam, which is a Mayan language spoken in certain areas of Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico. He emphasized that with time and support, students like him who come with another first language, can learn Spanish and English.

Kevin also expanded on the role peers played in his learning by describing their efforts to translate content for him, as well as actively reach out to him and invite him to join in conversations. Classmates took the time to teach him the nuances of the English language and that exchange was beneficial to his social and linguistic adaptation:

> Oh yes they were so good. As time goes on you start meeting people. There were some
>
> who are from this country and they try to help you, translate things for you, I know that helped me as well. To have classmates who speak two languages and have them help you, translate what the teacher is saying, if the teacher doesn't speak Spanish. For me it was a big help to have classmates who knew the language and would tell you to join them and to learn to pronounce things correctly, how things work, words and yes I believe to have bilingual peers is another source of help, not only teachers can teach you, but also your classmates.
>
> [*Interviewer: Tell me more about that interaction.*] I think it is the humility they have, because many are children of immigrants, some of them are children of immigrants and they know what their parents have gone through. And to have them like trying to help others, I learned from them, from various classmates. Learned about where their parents came from and they know how things are and to see them help, it is the very best. The help they give you, it is also like respecting others, people who come from other countries.

Kevin situated peers as a source of knowledge and as teachers of language. Classmates' efforts to help him left an indelible mark on Kevin who saw this gesture as humanizing and affirming. In these dynamic classrooms all students had the opportunity to deploy their entire linguistic

repertoires. This practice was particularly affirming and humanizing for the immigrant-origin youth who looked up to models of bilingualism among their teachers and peers.

Garcia (2020) stated that "translanguaging moves beyond the language of the text itself to focus on the language of the person" and regardless of the language of the text or task, "bilingual readers always assemble all their available meaning-making resources" and when translanguaging spaces are opened, as we see in these classrooms, all students are allowed to bring their whole selves (p. 557). Whether it was Michelle or Jose recalling what it felt like to be able to contribute in class, all students highlighted their own learning exchanges with peers whose bilingual skills were more complex. These students presented powerful models of translanguaging in action and although they did not label their actions with that name, they made the theory come to life by describing how they mobilized languages to make meaning, to build and bridge relationships, and to become scholars in their new contexts. The monolingual or even bilingual text or interaction in a classroom was transformed by these emerging bilinguals who brought their entire selves—languages, emotions, histories, and their lived experiences—into the texts and discussions (Garcia, 2020). It is that keen awareness that informed Kevin's statement about what it meant to be helped by bilingual peers and how that help represented the utmost sign of respect for another human being.

The school's mission and core competencies for students describe an intentional focus on bilingualism as an asset (See Appendix B). Since its foundation the school has embraced bilingualism and multiculturalism as a core competency for all students. The updated versions of the mission and vision made explicit reference to translanguaging spaces that serve to affirm students' identities. There were also connections to abolitionist teaching and healing-centered

pedagogies that were integrated in the spring and summer of 2020 (See Appendix B). Students and the community as a whole were at the center of the school's democratic leadership infrastructures that seek to authentically engage all the voices at the school. The school's social-justice and community orientations have allowed students to embrace their linguistic repertoires and identities in a holistic manner. For unaccompanied youth the language acquisition process was then another part of their learning journey, the process itself was part of the norm at the school. Co-researcher Jose explained it this way: "In our school there is bilingualism and we have different people from different countries, I think it would not make sense (*no existe la cara*) to say: you are from another country and you can't be part of our team." The school curated spaces where daily language transactions affirmed students' complex identities. H.M.I. posited that if schools were to fully understand the conditions for immigrant-origin youth, particularly unaccompanied youth, learning and integration would be facilitated. He felt that his school had done that with him, especially through the open translanguaging spaces teachers created.

Curated Spaces for Connection

Another layer to the humanizing practices these youth experienced at this particular school was the intense sense of connection they felt in their school community. The youth described how the connections to teachers and peers transformed them. Alex relished the relationships he formed with students from other countries and cultures and saw this as an advantage to learning in the United States:

> For me it has been something like great, so to speak, because I see friendships not only from the same country, but from other countries and you learn how from other cultures, that were not present in one's country. And you learn, you realize that how, let's say an example, say that those from Mexico think they are the best. But I have met people from Mexico, and they are not like that, they are friendly, that helps you, they are not how other people say they are. In my own personal experience I see that. I learn. [Interviewer:

> Does school help with that?] Yes, our school academically is great. And they also put us all in the same classroom, we are not separated by race or language, we are together, there is no division based on where you come from. Yes, no division by countries, by skin color or things like that. So it has been good for me, what I have experienced has been good to learn, to learn and reflect if there is something I did not do well. And the teachers, they support us. They tell us that we can do it, that we can be better and sometimes the teachers who are immigrants and to see them it is like an inspiration, to say I can be a teacher, I can be that, and inspire others to go forward. And yes over there [in his home country] we are only with the same people, we don't always interact with other cultures or languages, like English.

Alex felt his learning was enriched by the other languages and experiences his classmates represented. He also realized the importance of having first-hand information about other cultures, rather than assuming things about people who are different from him. His own experience getting to know people from other countries and cultures broadened his view of others. There was also a desire to help and inspire others, just like his teachers had inspired him to follow his dreams. He shared his dream to be an art teacher and seeing his art teacher in action, an immigrant herself, was instrumental in developing this ideal for himself. Alex's pursuit of an education is inextricably connected to the desire to give back to the community.

For Kevin, *educación* was primarily about the connections he made with teachers who saw Kevin's humanity and offered a space to connect:

> Oh the teachers, well, personally the teachers were a great help to me. Because sometimes I didn't have, I did not have the desire to continue, as there were times when I wanted to give up and the teachers were always looking for solutions. They always gave you options, always wanted to help you, they would tell you that it is possible. Personally, the teachers were very helpful to me, because they gave me the tools on how to get things done. Personally for me there were teachers who, it was as if they weren't just teachers, they were people, because they give you advice that one seeks and they gave you support that, the right support.

Kevin found healing spaces in his school and teachers who took the time to be "people" and human first, their advice on how to adjust to school or how to go about the process of schooling

made all the difference for him. Once he had the "right support," he felt he had the motivation, the desire, and the know-how needed to be a student in his new US school.

In addition to connections with peers, students identified connection more broadly. For Michelle the idea of continuing her education was part of her identity from a very early age and now in the United States there was an added layer that connected education to service, or rather connection to others via service:

> When I was little I always wanted to be a lawyer or a doctor, we always played, but now I have another perspective, and now I am older and I think that things are changing, they have been changing. And right now I am thinking more about a career I like and where I also, I can help other people, for example as a nurse, with what is happening today, then more like this, with more reason, I believe. I think I'm going to study nursing and then if God allows it, well or at another level, I want to graduate from, as a doctor.

Michelle contextualized her ideas about nursing through the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and what she saw as a significant current need in her community. She recognized her own family needed her, but she also expressed that as she was getting older her perspective was widening to include a broader community that also needed her assistance and contributions. Within Michelle's journey as a student there was evidence of the potential of educational spaces to become liberatory for individuals and communities. The transformative practices at Michelle's school amplified her perspective and allowed her to learn and grow at the intersection of her multiple, complicated identities by humanizing those identities and building upon the inherent connection humans share. The school provided more than just a space with internet access and lockers, it provided a space for what Sandoval (2000) called "horizontal alternatives" where oppositional movements are "occurring from 'margin to center,' 'inside to outside,' that describe life in the 'interstices' or 'borderlands,' or that center the experiences of 'travel,' 'diaspora,'

‘immigration,’ ‘positionality,’ or ‘location’ on the grid” (p. 91). In addition, Sandoval argued that this deterritorialization of power dynamics is essential to a methodology of the oppressed that can authentically create spaces of liberation for all. Michelle’s school welcomed *educación* at the borderlands, a land where students, including young immigrant-origin students, may soar without having to shed any part of who they are or what their dreams represent to themselves as individuals, their families, and to the community at large.

Curated Spaces for Healing

Students also interpreted spaces where they received specialized support by individual staff members or through communal practices like community circle, as integral to their wellbeing and their development as scholars and human beings. H.M.I. explained that various teachers and staff members made themselves available to him and that motivated him:

> Yes, but you know things happen for a reason; thanks to that [choosing his high school] I met so many new friends. I met [Ms. X.] and she was always there, for the four years I was there, she never, ever left us to fend for ourselves. She was always there with good vibes and she trusted us and had confidence in us and would tell us that we could do it and to do our best. And, of course, I can also share the example of [Ms. Y.]. I loved going to her class, because I felt that in that, was that class where I recharged my batteries, she would share her own life anecdotes and how it had been for her, and for you, those examples motivated me. And from various teachers as well, like [Mr. Z.] who always supported us; I would always use that support to motivate me and yes there was also an art teacher who so kind with us, her name was [Ms. A.]; she too had a story [immigration story] and I used to love going to her class and study art, and sometimes through art you reflect life and you can draw life through a sketch.

H.M.I. reflected on the power of the adult support to motivate him and to provide a space where his immigrant experience was validated and contextualized *vis-à-vis* the experience of immigrant-origin staff members and teachers in the school. He appreciated that the adults were taking the time to connect with him on a human level. The youth made meaning of their schooling through their personal histories and complex identities. Interacting with immigrant

staff members highlighted the possibility for students themselves to achieve their goals. The power of the connections students built with these adults fueled and sustained their resolve to succeed in school and embrace a scholarly component to their identities.

Kevin put his experience in these words: “The teachers were not only teachers, they were like a friend and a partner. And that was what I liked about them, that they were like friends.” Kevin appreciated the humanizing approach used by his teachers who affirmed his humanity, listened and shared advice and tips on how to navigate his new context. Kevin also shared that he would encourage the school to continue with practices like community circle or college field trips:

> Keep giving support to people who need it, right? Because when one looks for a future, one wants to do things. Give opportunities, I would ask them to continue with the method they invented, to motivate you, and take people for a field trip so that they can get inspired about, or exceeding, or to overcome, have a goal, have a goal, that’s what I would tell the school, to continue to give that support. I think that is a very great support, to motivate you, motivation.

Kevin spoke of the various layers that are addressed through healing spaces at his school: there is the individual advice shared by teachers and staff, the opportunities to experience a college campus through a field trip, and the motivating adults do to encourage students to participate in school and advance in their education. The motivational component is integral to the students’ sense of belonging, which ultimately resulted in students thriving in their new school context.

The youth in this study characterized their school and school personnel, especially their teachers and support staff at the school, as having a humanizing effect that was healing in nature. The way teachers approached them as “friends and partners” as Kevin phrased it, made them trust in their new system and open themselves to possibilities for fulfilling their dreams. These “healing” spaces served to support the personal, socio-emotional, and scholarly identities of the

youth at the school. The teachers took the time to explain things to students and to listen to their stories. Kevin shared that he was cognizant that there were many limitations to his desire to pursue an education in his home country. He explained what he had learned in his school that was preparing him for the future: "I learned to overcome, to do things, for me that was a great advantage that I never found in my country." Kevin realized that the school was providing what he had been searching for—an authentic opportunity to educate himself in a healing environment.

All the narratives offered insight into the high level of commitment students demonstrated to educating themselves and to taking advantage of the opportunities they were discovering in their new school—access to teachers with high content knowledge, an academic counselor who was supportive, resources, and a sense of being valued for wanting to pursue their education. The school intentionally set out these networks of support as evidenced by its professional development content and calendar, mission and vision statements, and responses to the needs of immigrant-origin youth through the work of a Newcomer Taskforce (See Appendix B, Appendix C, & Appendix D). The taskforce included a counselor, a coach, a coordinator, teachers and the principal of the school. Together the task force analyzed various sources of data for immigrant students, including a student survey that helped guide the actions of the committee. The work of the taskforce was shared with the school's Leadership Team and various stakeholder groups which foregrounded the significance of the work, especially for those most impacted by the work, the students. According to minutes of meetings of the English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC), parent leaders also felt a great responsibility to respond to the needs of immigrant students with compassion and direct assistance. The parents even considered

becoming sort of “surrogate parents” for those students who were here without any close family. The parents observed classes and met some of the students and later interacted with them through various school activities. It was evident that the school community rallied behind the unaccompanied youth. The descriptions, experiences, and interpretations the youth shared attested to the support the school had put in place.

A Final Reflection

H.M.I. contrasted his educational experiences in Oaxaca to those in the United States by highlighting the free education in his new school, access to a library, textbooks, tutoring and teachers to help him. But perhaps more instrumental to his engagement with education was the different cultures present in his classrooms. He appreciated the richness others—with their languages and cultures—were adding to his own learning experience. H.M.I. reflected on his initial difficulties with content classes like history and how his experience crossing the border forged his tenacity:

> They were four very difficult years, because, they were difficult, they were not easy, but nevertheless I had to do it, no? Because I had to, I had no option, I had no option to give up, right? Because as long as, like during the first week or the second week, I used my experience at the border, right? The many times I crossed, and I could not [get across] the first time; then I always used that when a new challenge came to me, when I had any problems, I always used that as a precedent, to say, I did it one time before, I can do it again. Oh of course, like at the beginning I had [Ms. X.], which is in I don't remember, if it was in 10th grade, or, uh, I failed, I failed. And we arrived to the class with my classmate [M.]. Well, we got to the class and were lost. Only the two of us were there who spoke, well, who did not understand English perfectly. The teacher did try to explain to us in Spanish, but we still felt lost with [M.]. We did not understand. So I remember, I was very sad when, when I saw my grade and it said F no? And I told myself, I'm going to set a goal for next year, I'm going to retake that class and I'm going to show the teacher, to show myself that I can pass that class.

H.M.I. attempted to cross the border seven times. He was finally successful on his seventh try. That same determination that helped him stay focused on his goal of coming over to the United

States, was his motor for staying focused on school and on accomplishing his goal of graduating from high school. He was very self-aware of feeling "lost" in the content and the new language, but when he failed world history, he decided he would try again the following year and this time pass the class and prove to himself that he could in fact do school, and do it well. By his second try H.M.I.'s English had advanced, and in a dual language context he leveraged his Spanish to understand the content and excel in the class. He also leaned on the support and guidance of his bilingual peers, which he considered a privilege. That year he passed the class with a high grade and once again proved to himself that there were many borders he could cross—from geopolitical borders to educational ones. By the time he graduated, he earned the seal of Biliteracy for his competency in English and in Spanish. He also earned the English Language Development Award for his language acquisition skills.

Kevin mentioned the impact of one important field trip to a technical-trade community college in his journey towards pursuing his education and obtaining employment in the automotive industry, which has always been his passion:

> And then when they took me on a field trip to [X Trade Tech], that's where I wanted to be. . . . With that I learned how to make my dreams come true; now that I work with cars, compared to where I was with where I am now, it is a big change for me.

For Kevin visiting a technical-trade college allowed him to visualize himself in that same place and to believe in possibilities. Because he supports his younger brother, his community college education has often been discontinued to allow for more work hours. However, it was that initial connection to the industry through a college visit that offered him the chance to end up at his current job, which he loves. The school created a space, capacious enough for his identities and dreams. In winter of 2021 Kevin decided to make another bold move and relocate to Tennessee,

where he is enjoying reconnecting with an uncle and working in different construction projects in rural areas. He loves his new milieu and "is enjoying all the new learning."

Unaccompanied youth see, experience, and make meaning of schooling through complicated identities and knowledges they create, shape, and form through their diasporic experiences. Schools can design spaces that allow for all those experiences and identities to flourish and thus inform and add relevance to the schooling process.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to foreground the voice of unaccompanied youth—those who traverse thousands of miles to the United States, to inform socially-just schooling practices. Unaccompanied youth are particularly vulnerable to inhospitable schooling conditions that often lead youth to abandon their educational dreams. In the aftermath of the anti-immigrant climate embodied by President Trump and fueled by xenophobic sentiments, it is essential for educational institutions to leverage the perspectives of immigrant youth to shape a system that has the potential to authentically educate, affirm, and transcend barriers. A participatory research methodology was integral to showcasing the expert knowledge these students held about schooling. It was the participatory nature of the study that allowed the youth to extract and expose what was truly important to them in their schooling experience—humanizing practices that should be sustained and replicated in all schools.

The youth named critical components to a just education including a redefinition of success, open and fluid language spaces, socio-emotional support, and positioning students as knowers, as creators of knowledge in the community. This chapter addresses the research question of how educational institutions may leverage the epistemology of unaccompanied youth to inform socially-just practices and policies in an anti-immigrant climate. In the first section the three salient themes, redefining success, prioritizing socio-emotional supports, and students as knowers, are addressed in relation to existing literature. The following sections offer implications for future research and praxis in the classroom and for school leadership. Recommendations based on the findings close out the chapter.

Expert Knowledges Around *Educación* Inform Policy and Practice

The youth proffered concrete practices that operationalize what it means to humanize education: Their identities as Scholars came through their interpretations and expert knowledges to inform educational practices in very clear ways. Their voices as youth co-researchers and participants clearly communicated what truly matters in the project of schooling for immigrant-origin youth in our public schools.

I. Redefining Success

One of the most significant ways schools can approach supporting immigrant-origin students is by broadening the definition of success. The current educational system is enmeshed in neoliberal accountability projects that "certify the failure of schools and by implication the communities of which they are a part, legitimating their disenfranchisement" which amounts to "neoliberal governance by exclusion" (Lipman, 2013, p. 570). Schools need a counter-hegemonic alliance, a path to counter narratives that interrogate the pathology ascribed to many marginalized populations of students. Fortunately, Lipman (2013) reminded us that "crises create new conditions for resistance" (p. 570). A form of resistance is for schools to create a variety of pathways for immigrant students to access educational dreams, including: (1) leveraging alternative school options with flexible scheduling, (2) ensuring schools are not penalized for granting students an additional year to graduate from high school, (3) removing some of the added requirements for students who are learning English, additional courses that can keep them out of more rigorous learning environments, (4) building partnerships with community colleges for training, certificate, and college programs, and (5) avoiding the narrow definition of what constitutes learning, especially as measured by annual standardized tests. AB212 in California is

a start, as it offered some exemptions from locally designed high school requirements for migratory and newcomer students. But this bill is just the beginning of the type of revisions that could enhance the opportunities for immigrant-origin students (Pupil Instruction AB2121, 2018; Torlakson, 2018). Based on this study the youth emphasized the importance of giving students ample time and support to adapt and to adjust. Jose poignantly encouraged schools to see early "failures" as just the first attempts at schooling in a new land, and not as the determining factor for a student's future.

Offering Students Time to Adapt

Adapting to a new land comprises different stages that depend on the experiences of the student. Time to adapt can mean working to make students feel comfortable by building positive relationships with them, being accessible and available to guide students, and offering ample opportunities for students to experience success. Alex emphasized the importance of starting out by helping students feel comfortable because that enables students to return to their dreams and aspirations:

> That at the beginning they [schools] make them feel comfortable, when they come, and that little by little they introduce them to, let them, give them more motivation, so they can realize themselves (*superarse*). Because this country is largely called the land of opportunity, the land to overcome, and they can. And that if they never give up they will be able to achieve what they dream of, their dreams of being someone in life, as a pro, to have a professional job.

Alex reminded us that when students feel comfortable enough to trust that they can overcome the barriers in their path, they are able to shift their focus to their educational goals and self-actualize. In Spanish he used the word *superarse*, which means to overcome and stand out. Alex felt grateful for the opportunity the school gave him to pursue his dreams. He shared the

following message of gratitude for his teachers and expanded on the challenges immigrant-origin youth may face:

> Probably just to say thank you, for everything you did to make me feel comfortable when I first came and for the advice you gave from time to time, to motivate us. They have motivated me to decide that I can go to a university, I can go see that or do that and never give up, because since I am, I am older. I had already studied from practically the same level of school so to speak, I have studied for about 16 years or 15 or 14 years, it is kind of boring for us to come, so to speak, that in my experience there in Honduras I was already going to graduate [high school]. I was going to get out of high school and coming here and starting over from the ninth grade is like a little bit, like they slow you down, and it causes like a bit of desperation, to continue, or say, or decide, I want to stop studying and I want to work, I want to money. But they have motivated me, in seeing how money is not everything, one can study, with that instead of earning little, with studying one can earn more.

Alex appreciated all the efforts teachers made to allow him to adjust to his new school. The advice he received to re-center education as an important endeavor helped with his feelings of desperation, especially as a young adult whose educational dreams were curtailed by his decision to come to the United States. In some ways, Alex was reunited with the educational journey he had started in his own country through the support of his teachers.

Hernan offered a similar message and asked that teachers continue to be attentive towards students and their needs:

> I think that, well, all of us, I know that we have different opinions and perspectives on how schools work, but I think that the most significant thing for me is that the teachers continue to be attentive to us and that they are always there, not always twenty-four hours a day, but that they be there to help us, when we need it. And also continue the practice of teaching in both languages, in Spanish and in English. That teachers not refuse when a student needs a favor and that they are there. I believe that should continue, to continue. I think to continue because the teachers are already doing it, so I would say that to follow that example, and to improve, right?

Hernan admitted that albeit teachers cannot be responding every single hour of the day, their availability to students makes a huge difference in engaging and motivating students. She also

expanded on the significance of bilingual practices as a support for students learning a new language and a new educational system. Hernan concluded by saying that teachers have been really good to her and: "the support they have given me, their words also keep me going, right, those words that motivate me to move forward, for which I am very grateful, to be able to hear those words."

For Jose it was important to communicate the positive aspects of his experience and what he believed other schools should replicate:

> I feel that what schools could do is. Well, I think the school, our school is mostly, is already doing, it is already doing enough. And yes, I do feel that they have done a lot especially with me, from my own experience. But I think that what other schools should copy is what is already being done at ours. Well, we have the advantage that there is bilingualism and there are also people from different cultures, there are other schools where you cannot experience the same thing. What the schools should improve is that they need to feel a little more compassion, or to be more aware of the other students who are from other cultures, not all have had the same advantages as they [others] have. So do not expect that in an educational system where, where they may have never been, that they will, ah, I do not know how to explain, that they will adapt quickly. That if there is a problem in, for example in a class, not to believe that just because of that, only because of that, [the student] is not able or capable to do other things.

Jose poignantly called for schools to build awareness about immigrant-origin students' experiences and to offer much needed compassion to help students adapt to their new context. He also cautioned school systems against determining that early failures in a student's trajectory signal a complete failure on the part of the student. Instead, Jose argued, difficulty in one class means that there is a need for additional help and that the difficulty does not negate a student's ability or capacity to succeed in other areas. Once again, there is a theme of building awareness about who students are as a whole and building positive relationships that guide students to success on their own terms.

II. Prioritizing Socioemotional Health and Wellness

The range of socio-emotional needs of unaccompanied youth is documented in the literature (Acuña & Escudero, 2016; Cardoso et al., 2019; Clark-Kasimu, 2015; Howard & Taylor, 2015; Keller et al., 2003; Pierce, 2016; Stavely, 2019; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011; Tello et al., 2017; Yoshikawa et al., 2016). How schools choose to respond is not as well documented, but school responses can certainly influence how students recover from the stressors and trauma they have endured. Kevin offered a compelling account that underscored the importance of direct mental health supports like counseling:

> The support they gave me, like emotionally, with a person who for me was a great help, being with a person where you can express yourself, who listens to you, well the experience I had at that school. Having, being under very high pressure, I had no one, did not speak to anyone and lost my motivation. There was a moment where I felt lost, wishing to throw everything overboard, but the support that most marked me in that school was the support that I was given by a professional person who knows what happens when one is not well, I wasn't well, mentally, due to what I went through, what I've been through at one point. I was a young person, I didn't know anything, how to do things, I didn't know how to face that situation, and having that help was a relief. Opening, putting it out there, the experience that I had, that I had, and once I did that, I felt like a great relief, taking off all that weight that I brought on with me. That is what impacted me the most, it was the most impactful for me. That help should also be offered to everyone, sometimes you hide things, there are things that you go through, the journey you take, leaves you marked. I think that help should be important for everyone. To ask you, how are you? It could be the most important thing for me, because there are people who only keep things, well, we all keep things and we don't want to talk. But I think it is important to speak it, to say it, to give value to expressing that, for me that would be what I would have liked the most.

Kevin's treacherous journey to the United States "marked" him in an indelible manner. Accessing professional counseling services helped Kevin heal and connect to his school community. This "great relief" he described propelled his motivation to stay in school and achieve his dream of completing high school. Kevin repeated a few times that this service needs to be provided to everyone, to every immigrant-origin youth because they may be masking the

hurt under other emotions or behaviors. He movingly explained the power of a simple question like *how are you*? to humanize students. Reaching out to students is the first step in establishing positive relationships that can transform into healing spaces for students like Kevin and possibly for all students.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2020 has only intensified the socio-emotional needs of students, teachers, and families in general. Fortunately, there is energy both at the California state level and at the national level to invest in mental health resources and access. In California, Governor Gavin Newsom signed multiple bills in 2020 (Newsom, 2020) that seek to: (1) reform care for those needing outpatient access to treatment (AB1976), (2) require health plans and insurers to cover medically necessary treatment for mental health and substance abuse (SB855), (3) allow for services that cover co-occurring disorders (AB2265), and (4) utilize health Peer Support Specialists that can be covered through Medi-Cal to have individuals who have suffered from mental health or substance abuse to be trained to support those in need (SB803). There are several additional bills covering other issues connected to mental health. In January 2020, Governor Newsom created the Behavioral Health Task Force to examine the range of needs in California and thus craft better-informed solutions (Newsom, 2020). There is no specific language pertaining to unaccompanied youth or undocumented Californians which means learning institutions serving these populations will have to be creative in how to mobilize resources for all students.

At the national level, much is expected from President Biden's administration. As a Vice-President he sought to expand mental health services through the Obama Care Act (The White House, 2013). There are indications he is committed to expanding mental health care services

and working against the stigma associated with mental illness; he has received accolades from the American Psychological Association for prioritizing mental health, which due to the pandemic has become ever more important to the wellbeing of communities writ large (American Psychological Association [APA], 2021). Schools can leverage the national and state actions to mobilize their own resources to provide students with appropriate counseling services. Large districts like the Los Angeles Unified School District have dedicated divisions to mental health including dedicated personnel to support schools (LAUSD Website, 2021). Schools must involve youth and their families in determining what is needed for a healing-centered approach to take root.

III. Positioning Students as Experts

Research in school settings can play a key role in the design of spaces that affirm students' identities, making way for truly emancipatory educational practices. Cardoso et al. (2019) reminded the field that research can lead to better responses for immigrant-origin youth, especially unaccompanied youth. Some scholars are calling for different types of research that place immigrant-origin youth as subject, not as subject of study (Heidbrink, 2014; Ozer & Piatt, 2017; Patel, 2013a, 2013b; Santelli et al., 2017). Critical, decolonizing participatory methodologies offer alternatives to educational agencies to build on youth epistemology and ontology to create third spaces where complicated identity categories can truly inform curriculum, instruction, assessment, and ultimately the purpose of schooling. There are multiple voices in the field tendering alternative ways to educate in our highly stratified, monolinguistic, racialized, genderized, schooling project as well as more accountable and responsible ways to conduct research (Abrego, 2020; Battiste, 2013; Espino, 2016; Fine, 2018; Garcia & Wei, 2014;

Garcia & Kleyn, 2016; Garcia et al., 2017; Ginwright, 2016; Grande, 2015; Love, 2019; Lyiscott, 2019; Patel, 2016).

The literature certainly called for schools to leverage their strategic position to craft learning spaces that go beyond the learning of English for immigrant-origin students (Aganza et al., 2019; Clark-Kasimu, 2015; Drake, 2017, Franquiz & Salinas, 2013; Howard & Taylor, 2015; Noguera, 2019; Oikonomidoy, 2014; Patel, 2013a; Patel Stevens, 2011; Stavely, 2019; Tello et al., 2017). According to Cammarota and Fine (2008) through YPAR youth learned to study problems and developed creative responses that better answer their needs:

> Once a young person discovers his or her capacity to effect change, oppressive systems and subjugating discourses no longer persuade him or her that the deep social and economic problems he or she faces result from his or her own volition. Rather, the discovery humanizes the individual, allowing him or her to realize the equal capabilities and universal intelligence in all humans, while acknowledging the existence of problems as the result of social forces beyond her or her own doing. Although YPAR provides the opportunity for young people to recognize how social constructions mediate reality, the praxis of YPAR allows them to perceive the human machinations behind these constructions and thus encourages recreative actions to produce realities better suited to meet their needs and interests. The knowledge that human agency constructs reality is power—a power that has very specific education and development outcomes. (pp. 6-7)

In this study youth voices confirmed the efficacy of school practices and also pointed to new directions to advance the work. As a result of this study the school established a school advisory board whose mission is to incorporate student perspectives and input in all aspects of the school. All the youth co-researchers have applied to four-year universities. In their applications they all reflected on the transformational nature of their participation in the research project. The project provided them with new tools to make sense of their world and to further develop their agency to change it. Three of the co-researchers will do a follow-up project with immigrant-origin youth in

the graduating class of 2021. Even through the pandemic, their work is contributing to a richer school environment for all students.

Circling back to the activism of DREAMers as captured by the UnitedWeDream movement, schools and communities can provide multiple entry points for students to directly participate in the schooling process. Youth across our nation are strategically positioned to lead. In Los Angeles, the movement Schools Students Deserve represents ten chapters across the county, in schools served by the LAUSD. Their mission is to mobilize youth, parents, and teachers to accomplish three main goals: (1) Educate ourselves, (2) organize to end policing and (3) push to fund community schools. These youth ask that education center "histories of dignity and resistance by oppressed communities, we build unity among people for the sake of increasing justice" (Schools Students Deserve, 2021). The platform also demands funding that provides opportunities for students to grow and for communities to thrive. "We know that funding safe and high quality schools is one important part of winning what students deserve" and they foreground the importance of attending to Black youth and families as a way to dismantle oppressive systems for all (Schools Students Deserve, 2021). This movement was instrumental in the LAUSD's decision to divest from school police and re-invest in school counselors and social workers.

What would happen if youth were also mobilizing at the state level and we, the adults in these spaces, were genuinely ready to listen? What new bills and policies would be crafted if those being "served" by politicians, policy makers, and educators were the generators of knowledge and responses? We would certainly end up with what Bertrand and Rodela (2018) call Collective Transformative Agency, meaning an expanded understanding of educational

leadership that would honor the knowledge of students and families, especially those at the margins. The power of communities to self-define and in Freirean terms, name their world to create "limit-acts" aimed at abolishing systems of oppression under which they are made to exist, has always been there (Freire, 2018). The potential for transformational changes resides among our youth.

The Power of *Educación* to Transform and Be Transformed

Schools represent a microcosm of society and democracy. Public schools remain strategically positioned to design and shape transformational spaces for students, especially those at the margins like unaccompanied youth. Howard and Taylor (2015) argued that schools are a natural place to address the needs of students. Potentially schools can go beyond responding to immediate student needs like learning a language, to reimagine *educación* through new academic identities, multiple literacies, civic engagement, human rights education, and student participation in society in powerful ways (Banks, 2019; Bhabha, 2019; Clark-Kasimu, 2015; Drake, 2017; hooks, 1994; Jaffee, 2016; Oikonomidoy, 2014; Patel, 2013a, 2013b, 2018; Patel Stevens, 2011; Ramirez & Jaffee, 2016). Furthermore, schools can address the adverse effects of trauma on the development of immigrant-origin children and youth and the negative impact of anti-immigrant rhetoric and "legal violence" (Aganza et. al. 2019; Menjívar & Abrego, 2012; Suarez-Orozco, 2011; Tello, 2017; Yoshikawa et al., 2016). The complex immigration landscape that awaits unaccompanied youth (Menjívar & Rabin, 2019; Young & McKenna, 2019) must be at minimum acknowledged within school settings, with information shared with students, teachers, staff, and community members. The goal must be to create a true sanctuary. Patel (2018) advanced that "true sanctuary requires much more furtive, strategic, and selfless behavior

on the part of those who already enjoy the protection of walking freely in society" (p. 528). Patel urged us to be creative in how that sanctuary is created for students and adds that literacy and access to navigational capital and knowledge is essential for immigrant-origin youth.

The youth in this study shared how their school affirmed their languages and identities, created spaces of authentic collaboration where learning was multi-directional, and where their dreams were acknowledged by the adults who took the time to teach them how to navigate their new educational space. The trusting relationships that were formed with peers, teachers, counselors, and staff aided the adaptation process and positioned the youth to take ownership of their own education and in turn think of ways to give back to their communities. The school created a healing space for the youth to thrive and feel inspired and motivated to engage and commit to an educational trajectory that was highly emancipatory. If this is happening in one public school in one of the densest areas of metropolitan Los Angeles, it means it can happen at multiple sites.

Limitations of the Study

Research projects always have limitations. The limitations of the study ranged from access to participants to the positionality of the principal investigator. But the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was like no other. It might be decades before researchers are faced with another global pandemic. This study, conducted with youth co-researchers, occupied a small space in this historical moment. Co-researchers and principal investigator alike had to come together in spite of multiple challenges brought on by the pandemic to complete the study. What fueled the group was a sense of purpose that the topic of investigation was truly significant and

that the epistemology of young people was absolutely necessary, especially during a global pandemic.

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The pandemic complicated all aspects of schooling. The lives of students were severely impacted by school closures. The loss of a physical space created a series of issues connected to accessing virtual learning platforms. For students who worked, jobs became scarce. On the other hand, students were often forced to work many more hours than usual because their families and guardians had lost their jobs. Longer work hours, babysitting duties, and other household chores fell on older students. For the co-researchers, all of these factors were present as a result of the pandemic. Adjusting to virtual learning was a process. The team took several weeks to reconvene in a virtual space and to re-commit to completing the project.

Once the team was back the difficulty was with recruiting participants. A few students the research team wanted to interview actually left the school. Those students were facing huge financial and housing difficulties because their sources of support (guardians) were negatively impacted by the pandemic. The team also felt it might be burdensome for some students who were struggling with housing and labor issues to participate in this study during this unprecedented time. The pandemic made access to students much harder and complicated how the research was conducted, hence the smaller sample than expected. However, the four co-researchers and two participants were able to share the power of their experiences in a transformative way that can guide other educational organizations to create powerful spaces for unaccompanied youth.

Access to Participants

Accessing participants who were willing to engage in participatory research about their own immigrant experience considering their vulnerability in the climate produced by the Trump administration was difficult. The participatory nature of the study also required a much more robust time commitment than a single interview. Fortunately, the youth co-researchers were enrolled in a research course which supported their development as researchers. Ultimately, four co-researchers were willing to participate in the project and worked after and before school to create the interview protocol, to analyze the data, and to make recommendations to their school community and schools in general. The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting school closure pushed the team to conduct meetings virtually. The co-researchers and participants were open to connecting via Zoom sessions, WhatsApp video calls, and messaging.

From Principal to *Colega*

Another possible limitation was my role as the principal investigator and the principal of the site where the research study was conducted. I have an asset-based orientation to all aspects of my work and scholarship. Therefore, I saw my role as the principal of the site as a strength. I also recognized the power dynamics at play. I own my formal role as the school leader. However, it is essential to add that my access to students was built through trusting relationships built over years of interaction. I taught some of these students. I listened to their life stories in my office on multiple occasions. I shared my own experiences as an immigrant. For the project, I reiterated to students that their role was completely voluntary and bore no consequence on their school records or community standing. Fortunately, from the beginning of the project the co-researchers felt the benefit of what they were learning and doing for their school community. As

we embarked upon this journey the relationships shifted and we opted to use the term *colegas* to refer to each other. A *colega* is a colleague, a partner. Our WhatsApp group was called *Nuestra Historia* and the icon for our space was a map of Central America. As we worked together as researchers the role constructs that placed us in separate categories dissipated and gave way to close working relationships.

After the study ended, the team continued meeting on a weekly basis to check in and to work on the college application process for the four co-researchers. All four co-researchers have applied to four-year universities. The multi-faceted challenges remain, but they are resourceful and they count on the support of their school and "families" to navigate a whole new process and landscape. Armed with research tools at their disposal, I am confident they are ready for their next academic and social adventure.

Immigrant Experience

Finally, as a Central-American immigrant myself and product of public schools, I came to this project believing and counting on the potential of immigrant-origin students. I have been an educator for over twenty years, often working with marginalized and minoritized communities. My stance as a scholar and educator finds potential, promise, resilience, and hope in young people, especially those at the margins. Some might choose to see that as a limitation, I saw it as an asset that speaks to the promise public schools and young people hold for the rest of our society. My research orientation is one that seeks to honor communities and work alongside them, much like Abrego (2020) spoke of "accompaniment" in her own research. I choose to engage in research that is "answerable to" the community in which the research is being

conducted (Patel, 2016). And because I appreciate the strengths of the communities in which I serve, I decided to honor the community through a participatory methodology.

Implications for Future Research

Research Across Multiple Sites

An exciting possibility for participatory research with unaccompanied youth would be to include several sites across the metropolitan Los Angeles area. Los Angeles is home to thousands of immigrant-origin youth and their voices need to be heard throughout the entire educational system. Much of the literature on undocumented immigrants and unaccompanied youth is done at the college level, having a multiple-site study at the secondary level would contribute valuable information to the field.

Unaccompanied Youth Under the Age of 18

Additionally, conducting research led by unaccompanied youth to learn more about the struggles of younger immigrants, ages five to 15, from elementary to middle school would be really powerful. If schools were able to implement better responses earlier on in the lives of students, students would have a more responsive path to adapting and thriving in their new land.

The Voices of Teachers, Counselors, and School Staff

The voices of teachers, counselors, and school personnel including the folks in school offices who are often called to translate for students and families, would add another piece to better understand the needs of the adults responsible for these immigrant-origin students. Combining the voices from students and the adults in charge of their educational experiences could provide a richer picture of the nuances involved in working alongside immigrant-origin youth, especially unaccompanied children and young adults.

The Role of Parents, Family, and Guardians

An understudied group of people connected to unaccompanied youth is their networks of support. The field and schools in particular would benefit greatly from better understanding the community and familial networks students possess, whether that means parents, uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, and family friends as guardians. Accessing those connections and networks could lead to community-based learning that would enrich the educational experiences of students.

Implications for Praxis

School Leadership

As a school principal I see the potential of participatory practices to forge truly democratic structures in schools that could eliminate or at least minimize power dynamics in the project of schooling. As formal leaders, principals can set the stage for centering the experiences and voices of marginalized populations of students, parents, community members, and even teachers. How a leader approaches the challenges in a school community can influence how the problem is perceived and what creative solutions can be designed that serve to humanize all those involved. Principals hold a privileged position to signal to the community what matters and how those issues that matter can be addressed in ways that affirm students, teachers, parents-guardians, and community members.

For those of us working in minoritized, marginalized communities constantly listening to what our students are saying, through their words and actions, can transform how we approach our work. The power of crafting spaces that allow for students' rich epistemology to inform how we lead, can have a transformational effect on our entire community. Patel (2016) lamented how

schools so often have very little to do with authentic learning, principals can change that by situating the work of the school within a learning orientation that values growth, process, and humanizing practices above neoliberal measures of success and accountability.

Classroom Practices

At the classroom level, centering youth voice will inevitably reshape the classroom into co-created spaces of learning that is relevant, rich, and dialogical in nature. In multilingual settings like Los Angeles, translanguaging practices can propel learning by honoring and legitimizing the linguistic repertoires and modalities of all students. There is so much potential and promise in translanguaging classrooms to unearth the dialogical nature of learning, that is often absent in classrooms sanitized of students' identities. Embracing new and old theories and practices that speak to urban and all youth can help the adults see the brilliance in each student, the potential for self-actualization, and the promise of education realized (Emdin, 2016; Freire, 2018; Garcia, 2020; Love, 2019; Lyiscott 2019).

Recommendations

My recommendations for the field as a practitioner-scholar represent an invitation to "open spaces" for young people, for students. What if our students continuously and genuinely informed what we do in our schools? I invite fellow practitioner-scholars, especially school leaders to:

- Use tools to analyze your system down to the root causes of problems that have been authenticated by your community (Bryk et al., 2015).

- Find ways for students to inform what you do in the name of "education" and break the cycle of having students and families simply rubber stamp school-set agendas; instead, allow collective transformative agency to surge (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018).
- Participatory methodologies continue to evolve, making them part of how the school approaches challenges can only enrich the ideas that blossom to address those challenges. Whether you are more of a Dewey scholar and your stance is around democracy in education, or you embrace a more critical view through a CRT lens, participatory research can open doors to real community activism and long-lasting changes created by the community, for the community. Open yourself to the vulnerability of fully democratizing your school community.
- Always start at the margins. Get to know your immigrant-origin students, your students with disabilities, your U.S.-born emerging bilinguals, your struggling students, your LGBTQI youth. Spend time with the families at the margins, the parents who may not be literate, the single-parents, the LGBTQI parents, the parents who are street vendors. The margins tell you the true story of what goes on at your school. If you are a school leader, shining light on the inequities of your system brings gravitas to the issues. Exert your influence and ask the difficult questions, especially of those who can effect systemic changes.
- Be passionate about your story—your school community's story which is rich in numbers and quantifiable items, but also flooding with knowledge that is produced by experience, an experience often related to the oppressive nature of our educational system. Be ready to listen.

Conclusion

For me this journey with four youth co-researchers was transformational. Listening to their voices represented a sort of reckoning—a reckoning of a system that is deeply flawed and not set up to embrace those at the margin. The process helped me identify flaws in my school system as well as promising practices. When you can learn from and almost touch the knowledge that is present in our youth, it can be very humbling because you are reminded that your role by its very nature, can keep you separated from this knowledge. And yet, working with youth in this way elevated the hope I have for our world to continue to heal itself, if we allow our youth to lead. If we can see every child and young person for the totality of who they are—that act itself humanizes us, connects us, and reminds us that our future is inextricably connected to theirs.

The four co-researchers are certainly amazing, but they are not exceptional in the sense that they possess something that other immigrant-origin youth do not or did not. Part of the difficulty of this journey was coming to terms with all those students we have lost along the way. We lost them because our responses were not helpful or affirming. We lost them because we failed to find out how they were experiencing our schooling practices. We lost them because perhaps it was easier to just let them go, rather than engage in an authentic dialogue with them.

As these four co-researchers prepare to go to college, my hope is that their next centers of learning embrace their brilliance and potential contributions. My hope is that these young men and women continue to share their knowledge with the world and thus uplift all those with whom they come in contact, even those who disparage them and dismiss them. I close with Jose's message of hope: "I think that in the end there will be, there will be light at the end of this tunnel

because it will not be forever that we are like this, that there is so much hatred." The light is here, embodied by Alex, Hernan, H.M.I., Jose, Kevin, and Michelle.

APPENDIX A

Sample Questions

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

SCRIPT. YOU SAY: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please remember that your participation is voluntary and you can opt out at any point during the interview. Please note that your answers will help educational agencies and educators to better respond to the needs and schooling experiences of immigrant-origin students like you. Thank you for your participation. This interview is divided into three parts that represent: (a) a section on your life history with a focus on schooling experiences, (b) details of your schooling experiences, and (c) reflections on the meaning of those educational experiences.

Protocolo para la entrevista

GUION, TU DICES: Gracias por aceptar participar en este estudio. Recuerda que tu participación es voluntaria y puedes optar por no participar en cualquier momento durante la entrevista. Ten en cuenta que tus respuestas ayudarán a las agencias educativas y educadores a responder mejor a las necesidades y experiencias escolares de los estudiantes de origen inmigrante como tu. Gracias por tu participación. Esta entrevista se divide en tres partes que representan: (a) una sección sobre la historia de tu vida con un enfoque en las experiencias escolares, (b) detalles de tus experiencias escolares y (c) reflexiones sobre el significado de esas experiencias educativas.

Parte I-Part I

Tu llegada y adaptación-Your Arrival and Adaptation

1. ¿Qué te inspiró a venir aquí? *What inspired you to come here?*
2. Platícanos sobre tu travesía, cómo fue tu experiencia y que pasaste para llegar a este país. *Tell us about your journey here.*
3. ¿Cuáles son las ventajas y desventajas que encuentras en USA comparado con tu país de origen? ¿Qué tal la escuela? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being here in the USA, compared to your country? What about school?

La familia-Family

1. Platícanos sobre tu familia aqui en USA. ¿Cuántos hermanos tienes aquí, cómo te relacionas con ellos? Tienes hermanos nacidos en USA? *Tell us about your family, do you have siblings, were they born here?*
2. ¿Qué espera tu familia de ti? *What does your family expect from you? From your education?*

Parte II-Part II

Tu Escuela-School

1. ¿Cómo terminaste en o escogiste esta escuela? ¿Porqué sigues en esta escuela? *How did you select or end up at this school?*
2. ¿Qué apoyo has recibido de la escuela? *What kind of support have you received from the school?*
3. ¿Cómo te han ayudado los maestros de la escuela para que sigas adelante o para que te sientas cómodo/a? ¿Cómo te han ayudado los maestros bilingües? *How have teachers*

supported you and encouraged you to continue in school? How have bilingual teachers helped you?

Aprender Ingles-Learning English

1. ¿Cuéntanos sobre tu proceso para aprender inglés? ¿Qué te ha ayudado? ¿Qué no te ha ayudado? Tell us about your process to learn English. What has helped you? What has not helped you?

Otros Estudiantes-Other Students

1. ¿Cómo te recibieron tus compañeros cuando primero llegaste y cómo ha cambiado eso? *How did your peers receive you and how has your relationship with peers change?*
2. ¿Cómo te sientes al interactuar con otros estudiantes que no son inmigrantes? *How do you feel about interacting with other students who are not immigrants?*

Contexto-Context

3. ¿Cómo te afecta la política actual anti-inmigrante y que pinta negativamente a los inmigrantes? *How does the current anti-immigrant politics that portrays immigrants negatively affect you?*

Reflexión-Parte III-Reflection-Part III

Alternative 1

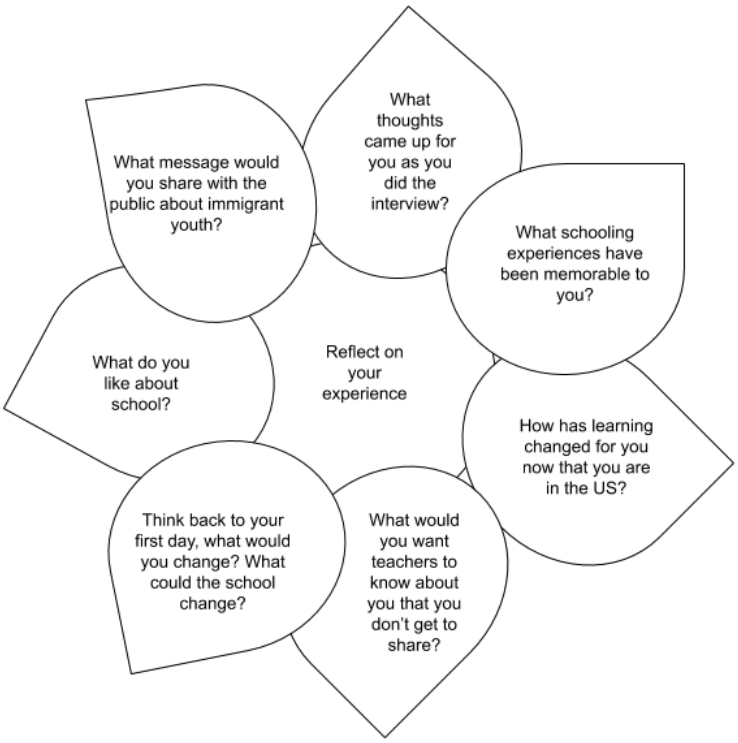
DUE TO COVID-19 WE ASK THESE QUESTIONS IN THE INTERVIEW. NO PAPER REFLECTION OR DRAWING.

- On a piece of paper write your impression of this interview. What issues or questions about your school experiences came up for you? What are your thoughts about your future in school? What can schools do to better support students like you?

- En una hoja de papel escribe tu impresión de esta entrevista. ¿Qué problemas o preguntas sobre tus experiencias escolares surgen para ti? ¿Qué piensas sobre tu futuro en la escuela? ¿Qué pueden hacer las escuelas para apoyar mejor a estudiantes como tu?

Alternative 2

On the flower below write your answer to each question on each of the petals. Feel free to add other details. En la flor de abajo escribe tu respuesta a cada pregunta, en cada uno de los pétalos. Puedes agregar otros detalles si lo deseas.



APPENDIX B

School Mission and Vision, Core Beliefs, Practices, and Tools

School Vision, Mission, and Core Competencies

Vision

We expect students who graduate from _____ to enter the adult world as confident and capable human beings, prepared to succeed in college, pursue meaningful careers, and participate in our democracy. The adults that support these students will know them well and ensure that each engages in scholarship that is challenging and relevant to their lives.

Mission Statement

UCLA Community School prepares all students to live rich and meaningful lives by providing a rigorous dual language instructional program within a strong supportive community that leads to college, careers, and civic participation.

Our Core Beliefs

Language and culture are central to learning and human development.

Individuals learn as members of a community that values their participation and is respectful, productive, antiracist, and inclusive.

The purpose of schooling is to guide all learners, both students and adults, to think critically about the world around them, to engage as agents of social change, and to promote democratic practices.

Core Competencies

We expect both students and teachers at _____ to develop four core competencies:

1. *Self-directed, passionate learner*
2. *Mastery of academic/pedagogical content knowledge*
3. *Bi-literate, bi-lingual, and multi-cultural*
4. *Active and critical participant in society*

School Core Beliefs

Language and Culture

We believe that culture is central to learning and human development.

Culture refers to concepts, ways of thinking, and belief systems that may be utilized and even negotiated through daily interactions by members of a community. Culture occurs in a variety of settings, each facilitating or requiring particular forms of expertise, multiple viewpoints, voices, and practices. In the same way, classrooms serve as micro-cultures where teachers and students interact with content mediated through artifacts, tools, symbols, and language in a meaningful way.

1) Language is a primary tool that transforms thinking, mediates learning, and guides our roles in a sociocultural classroom.
2) Because knowledge is socially constructed and socially mediated, people acquire knowledge through participation in joint-activity.
3) Learners, both students and teachers, are challenged and developed by others within their zone of proximal development.
4) Students are engaged in meaningful work with peers or the teacher that targets real-life problems that require problem-solving, critical thinking, and application of strategies and skills.
5) Teaching and learning must validate, enrich, and support the culturally, socially, and linguistically, diverse student population.

Community

We believe that every individual is an important member who contributes and participates in the community that is respectful, productive, antiracist, and inclusive.

1) The spatial arrangement, social relationships of the participants, and norms for participation directly affect classroom talk.
2) Multiple perspectives and viewpoints and diverse forms of participation are essential for creating an antiracist climate.
3) The individual and collective needs of the students are addressed in order to utilize the cultural assets, or funds of knowledge students bring into the school community.
4) Schools are sites for transformative teaching practices for educators to become reflective practitioners as they constantly interpret theory and develop practice in a professional community.

5) Teachers need to be engaged in joint-activity with other colleagues, experts, administrators, and instructional coaches to reflect on their own backgrounds and biases and transform their practices to be able to abolish structures of systemic racism.

6) Restorative justice approaches will be used when conflict arises between teachers, students, staff, and administration.

Social Justice and Civic Participation

We believe that the purpose of schooling is to guide all learners, both students and adults, to think critically of the world around them, empower them as agents of social change, and promote democratic practices.

1) School communities serve as social transformers, by empowering and validating the linguistic and cultural background of the students to actively eliminate white supremacy which manifests in the forms of racism, sexism, classism, heteronormativity, xenophobia, ableism, and all the other forms of oppression.
2) Our school commits to challenge the status quo by rethinking and demanding teaching and learning that is dynamic, culturally relevant, and heterogeneous.
3) All stakeholders will participate in the decision-making process of every aspect of the school.
4) Students are equipped to solve problems, develop social skills, and learn to be responsible members of our world.
5) Students critically question the content and are actively involved in negotiating the process of learning.

Grounding Documents:

- Multilingual and Multidisciplinary Framework (see screen shots; due to the nature of the document this was the best way to protect the identity of the school)

Domains	Strategies, Behaviors, and Dispositions

Linguistic Assets and Resources	**Language Instruction**
	• If you are an **upper-school teacher or observing an upper-school teacher**, which language is used as the primary language of instruction for the observed lesson? How do you incorporate other languages represented in your classroom?
	  ▪ How does the disciplinary team ensure students are receiving targeted instruction in English and Spanish (the partner language) during the academic school year? For instance, does the disciplinary team offer courses where students can receive primary language instruction in Spanish, as the target language?
	• If you are a **lower-school teacher or are observing a lower-school teacher**, which language is used as the primary language of instruction for the observed lesson? How do you incorporate other languages represented in your classroom?
	  ▪ How does the Den balance target language instruction in English and Spanish (the partner language) during the academic school year?
	
	Language Use and Frames of Mind
	• What languages do your students use in their community and what motivates them to use these languages in their community? In your classroom? What are students' cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identities? How do you incorporate your students' identities in your classroom? How do you incorporate your students' identities ***in this lesson?***
	☐ How comfortable are students using and learning English, Spanish, or another language in the classroom? How comfortable are you ***using*** and ***instructing in*** languages other than English? **How will you address the spectrum of comfort using English, Spanish, or other languages as you plan this lesson?**
	• What attitudes do students have about ***using*** and ***learning*** English, Spanish (the partner language), or another language in the classroom? In what ways, do your teaching practices, beliefs, values, and behaviors influence students' attitudes about ***using*** and ***learning*** different languages?

Democratic Classrooms	**Classroom Norms** **Teacher:** *Do you…(see norms below)?* **Observer:** *Does the classroom teacher…(see norms below)?* • Organize the classroom (e.g., physical, psychological, and linguistic space) to produce a flexible learning environment. • Execute classroom routines consistently. • Incorporate classroom routines that encourage student engagement and participation. • Clearly, articulate regulative registers[2] (including directives) in students' home/heritage language or with translanguaging strategies to model or facilitate self-directedness (e.g., First we will…Then, we will...Today's goal is to…) • Honor students' perspectives (e.g., "wait time")[3]. • Foster student self-directed behavior by providing opportunities for student choice and teacher or student modeling of self-directed behaviors[4] • Together, teacher and students create classroom norms, set goals and strategies *to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in all students' educational experiences.*[5] **Sociocultural[6] Classroom Routines** *Classroom routines that relate to supportive teacher-student relationships*[7] **Teacher:** *Do you…(see routines below)?* **Observer:** *Does the classroom teacher…(see routines below)?* • Encourage caring, respectful, warmth, and empathic teacher-student and student-peer interactions. • Learn about students' lives, interests, and cultures and real-life contexts and encourage students to do the same. • Promote multiple perspectives • Draw on students' experiences to help them learn • Integrate students' home/heritage languages to relate to students and/or for instruction. • Sensitively listen to the concerns the classroom community or individual students may have and encourage students to also be sensitive to others' needs. • Celebrate/acknowledge students' strengths (e.g., academic, cultural, linguistic) and encourage students to also partake in celebrating and acknowledging others. • Develop open lines of communication. • Engage students in self-reflection *to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in all students' educational experiences.*[8] • Empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using culture to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes[9]
Language and Literacy Strategies for Language Learners	**Instructional enhancements** Strategies and practices used by teachers to expand students' content understanding, language base, and talk (in Spanish, English, and other home/heritage languages) **Teacher:** As you plan your lesson, which instructional enhancements will you incorporate? Will you incorporate…(see strategies below)? **Observer:** Does the classroom teacher incorporate…(see strategies below)? ☐ **Scaffolding strategies -** Students' content understanding and language is supported with visuals, graphic organizers, questioning techniques, and feedback[10]. Students' home/heritage language is used to support comprehension and/or activate prior knowledge. Translanguaging strategies may be used as a ***structural or process***[11] scaffold.

Include[12]:
- Modeling
- Bridging
- Contextualization
- Schema Building
- Text Representation
- Developing Metacognition

Translanguaging strategies[13]
When translanguaging, there is not a strict separation of languages at all times, but there can be a more fluid use of both languages ***strategically*** in the same lesson[14].

Purposes for translanguaging in the classroom[15]**:**
- To provide support for students to engage and comprehend academic content
- To give students opportunities to engage in language practice while reading academic content
- To provide a space for students to further develop their bilingualism
- To promote the socio-emotional development of students, especially their bilingual identities (refer to the *Democratic Classroom* section above)

Examples: code-switching, language brokering; cross-linguistic strategies; meta-bilingual awareness; translation

Academic language development strategies (for content-specific vocabulary and general academic vocabulary)[16] –
- Use of words to discuss content and texts;
- Independent word learning strategies [e.g., use of cognates, context clues, word parts, or a combination of all three],
- Contextualizing academic language using social language and students' language experiences)

Quality of dialogue:
- **Speaking out** (e.g., speculating, imagining, hypothesizing; narrating; arguing, reasoning, justifying; explaining; instructing; asking questions; and analyzing and solving problems)
- **Taking in** (e.g., active listening, being receptive to multiple alternative viewpoints, thinking about what is heard, and giving students time to think)
- **Responding to student questions with informative or generative feedback**[17]
- **Student-centered tool -** (e.g., debates, fishbowls, gallery walks, roleplaying, think-pair-share, small group work)

Pedagogy	**Teacher | Observer:** At what multicultural level is the lesson? **Level 1 - Contributions** **Definition:** Heroes, cultural components, holidays, and other discrete elements related to ethnic groups are added to the curriculum on special days, occasions, and celebrations. **Level 2 - Additive:** **Definition:** This approach consists of the addition of content, concepts, themes, and perspectives to the curriculum without changing its structure. **Level 3 - Transformation:** **Definition:** The basic goals, structure, and nature of the curriculum are changed to enable students to view concepts, events, issues, problems, and themes from the perspectives of diverse cultural, ethnic, and racial groups. **Level 4 - Social Action:** **Definition:** In this approach, students identify important social problems and issues, gather pertinent data, clarify their values on the issues, make decisions, and take reflective actions to help resolve the issue or problem.

- Social Justice Framework (see below)

- Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2017-06/TT_Social_Justice_Standards_0.pdf

Social Justice Checklist

Social Justice Education at _____ actively addresses systems of oppression and privilege in society through anti-racist curriculum, multilingual education and the promotion of student and community agency.

Social Justice in the Classroom

Core Competency #1: Support students to be Self-Directed Passionate Learners

- ❑ Holistic development of healthy, empowered, passionate humans who have agency
  - ❑ Classroom experiences and relationships that help each individual discover their strengths and weaknesses
- ❑ Explicit teaching of socio-emotional skills and ongoing support
- ❑ Teacher commitment to restorative practices that interrupt school to prison pipeline
- ❑ Support parents/families in their agency to make choices for their students' education and well-being

Core Competency #2: Support students to be Masters of Academic/Pedagogical Content through anti-racist, culturally relevant curriculum

- ❑ Examination of systems of oppression/privilege
  - ❑ Teach students to read all varieties of text/media through critical lens
  - ❑ Curriculum promotes equity and inclusion (race/gender/immigration status/etc.)
- ❑ Multiple perspectives represented, especially the experiences/narratives of those affected/present at event/phenomena
  - ❑ Exposure and analysis of empowering text and images of historically-marginalized groups
  - ❑ Intentional choices of what instructional materials we use to include multidimensional views of a culture or people group
  - ❑ Fuller knowledge and celebration of achievements and lives of people/communities of color, women, etc. (not always through the lens of struggling or being oppressed)
- ❑ Classroom learning is connected to students' real lives and gives them skills/knowledge to effect change in their own lives/families/communities/society
  - ❑ Project-based or inquiry-based or problem-based learning
  - ❑ Authentic connection to world outside of school
  - ❑ Knowledge is applied to real world problems

Core Competency #3: Create a classroom that promotes Biliteracy, Bilingualism, and Multiculturalism

- ❑ Listening to, respecting, and bringing in students' funds of knowledge and experiences
- ❑ Break away from dominance of English and promote multiple language use in classroom discourse
- ❑ Teachers use multiple strategies to differentiate for all student subgroups, including English language learners, students with IEPs, and newcomers

Core Competency #4: Support students to be Active and Critical Participants in Society

- ❑ Teacher develops student-led curriculum to facilitate student learning and discovery
  - ❑ More student output than teacher output
  - ❑ Activities/structures that promote engagement of diverse learners and struggling students
- ❑ Respectful interactions between all people in the classroom (teacher-student, student-student)
  - ❑ Address conflict with restorative practices that are relationship-focused (vs. rule-focused) and explicit socioemotional learning
  - ❑ Positionality and power is recognized and considered
- ❑ Student agency in classroom practices
  - ❑ Regular opportunities for student voice and choice in what/how we learn
  - ❑ Fair and transparent communication of school policies, including grading
- ❑ Challenge existing structures of traditional classroom/status quo
  - ❑ Create projects where students and families can share their funds of knowledge

APPENDIX C

Enrollment Protocol for Newcomer Students

Newcomer Student Profile

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Today's date:

2. Name:

3. Date of birth and age:

4. EL Years (or number of years in the United States):

5. Grad Year:

6. Age at Grad Year:

7. Birth Country:

8. Home Language(s):

9. Literate in home language?
- Yes
- No

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

10. Attended school outside of the United States?
- Yes
- No

If yes, number of years (or up to what grade level)?

FAMILY INFORMATION

11. Reason for immigration (e.g. political refugee, economy refugee, work, family reunification, educational opportunity)?

12. How did you come to this country and what was your experience like?

13. Did you spend time in a detention center? Where? For how long?

14. Who do you currently live with?

EMPLOYMENT

15. Are you currently working?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what does your work schedule look like?

ACADEMIC GOALS

16. Goals / plans for the future:

17. How do you think our school can help you achieve those goals?

18. Who is your advisor?

19. Are you currently enrolled in Newcomer Seminar?

- Yes
- No

20. Preferred learning style or environment:

21. Something you want others to know about you?

Check-List

- Student profile
- Initial ELPAC (California state test to determine level of English proficiency)
- PE clothes
- Supplies
- School access accounts
- Cafeteria pin codes
- Legal Clinic intake
- Social Worker intake
- Email teachers

APPENDIX D

Sample Slides of Newcomer Course: Learning a New Land

Learning Lab...Learning a New Land

Yes We Can!

Nuestra meta en 4 partes Our Goal is 4-pronged

1 Learning English — Aprender ingles

2 Pass my classes — Pasar mis clases

3 Plan for the Future — Planificar para el futuro

4 Cultural Identity — Identidad cultural

Agenda Thursdays

- Welcome
- Review options
  - A)Work on classwork, homework or projects OR
  - B)Practice English
  - C) Reading

- Bienvenida
- Opciones:
  - A)Trabajar en tareas y proyectos O
  - B)Practicar el inglés
  - C) Lectura

Guided Meditation

1. Welcome to 2nd Semester
2. Welcome to our class
3. We will take 3 deep breaths
4. Close your eyes and set an intention for yourself this semester: (Examples)
   a. Do you want to learn more English?
   b. Do you want to work well with your peers?
   c. Do you want to find a job?
5. Think of that intention
6. Open your eyes and share a word that will help you stay focused in 2019

1. Bienvenidos al 2do semestre
2. Bienvenidos a la clase
3. Empezamos con 3 respiraciones profundas
4. Cierra tus ojos y piensa en una intención que tienes para ti mismo este semestre (ejemplos):
   a. Quieres aprender más inglés
   b. Quieres trabajar mejor con tus compañeros
   c. Deseas encontrar un trabajo
5. Piensa ne sa intencion
6. Abre tus ojos y comparte una palabra que te ayudará estar enfocado/a en el 2019

English Work

1. Vocabulary
    a. Learning words: pronunciation and spelling
2. Language Forms
    a. Verbs, adjectives, grammar etc.
3. Language Functions
    a. Asking and answering questions, explaining, arguing, opinions, etc.

1. Vocabulario
    a. Palabras: pronunciación y ortografía
2. Formas del lenguaje
    a. Verbos, adjetivos, gramática, etc.
3. Funciones del lenguaje
    a. Como hacer y contestar preguntas, explicaciones, argumentos, expresar opiniones etc.

Agenda Thursday 12-6-18

- End of seminar survey
- Celebration
- Good luck with finals and projects!

- Encuesta sobre el seminario
- Celebración
- ¡Suerte con los exámenes finales y proyectos!

Caminante no hay camino

"Todo pasa y todo queda

Pero lo nuestro es pasar....

Caminante no hay camino,

Se hace

Camino al andar."

-Antonio Machado

Poeta

Dialogue #15 November 29, 2018

Going Shopping!

A.It's Black Friday! All the stores have sales!

B.I really want to _____.

A.Oh, I need _____.

A.Let's go to _____. They have _____.

A.What about _____ after shopping?

B.Yes! _____.

A._____

Shop
Buy
Pants, skirt, shirt, blouse, sweater, coat, jacket, socks, shoes
Watching
Movie
Grab a bite to eat
Eat somewhere

Life Skill Activity: Teamwork Part 2

The Human Knot

Directions:

- Stand in a circle
- reach your right arm towards the center and grab someone else's hand, but not the hand of the person next to you
- reach your left arm in and grab someone else's hand

Goal:

- figure out how to untangle your bodies without letting go of each other's hands

Activity Discussion Questions

- What were some skills necessary in this activity? / ¿Cuáles fueron algunas habilidades necesarias en esta actividad?

- What are some strengths you saw in others? / ¿Cuáles son algunas fortalezas que viste en los demás?

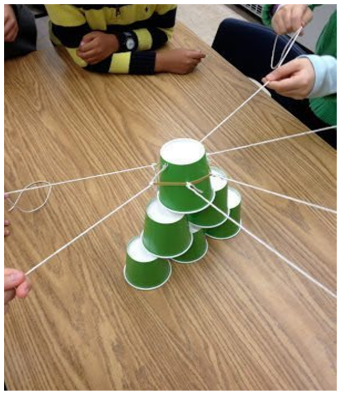
- How can we use what we learned through this experience in situations outside the game? / ¿Cómo podemos usar lo que aprendimos a través de esta experiencia en situaciones fuera del juego?

Grade Check Analysis

1. **Describe lo que observas en tus calificaciones.**
2. **¿Qué significan estas calificaciones para ti?**
3. **¿Cuáles son las 2 clases en las que te gustaria mejorar?**
4. **¿Qué estas dispuesto a hacer para mejorar este semestre?**

1. What do you notice?
2. What do these grades mean to you?
3. What are two classes you would like to focus on this semester?
4. What are you prepared to do differently this semester?

Life Skill Activity: Teamwork Part 1



No-Hands Cup Stacking Challenge

DIRECTIONS

- 6 people in each group
- Each person in the group holds on to one of the strings attached to the rubber band
- As a group, use this device to pick up the cups (by pulling the rubber band apart and then bringing it back together over the cups)

GOAL

- Build a pyramid by placing the cups on top of each other (3 on the bottom, 2 in the middle, 1 on the top)

Teamwork: Discussion Questions

- Was anyone frustrated at all during this activity?
  ¿Alguien estuvo frustrado durante esta actividad?

- What did you learn about yourself and others?
  ¿Qué aprendiste sobre ti y los demás?

- Why was teamwork so important in this activity?
  ¿Por qué el trabajo en equipo fue tan importante en esta actividad?

- What are some skills needed to be good at teamwork?
  ¿Cuáles son algunas habilidades necesarias para ser bueno en el trabajo en equipo?

- How can we use what we learned through this experience in situations outside the game?
  ¿Cómo podemos usar lo que aprendimos a través de esta experiencia en situaciones fuera del juego?

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